

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES, JOB
SATISFACTION, AND INTENTION TO LEAVE THE PROFESSION OF
URBAN ELEMENTARY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

A Dissertation

by

BRENDA F. MELONCON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

An Examination of the Professional Challenges, Job Satisfaction, and Intention to Leave
the Profession of Urban Elementary Special Education Teachers

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of the Professional Challenges, Job Satisfaction, and Intention to Leave
the Profession of Urban Elementary Special Education Teachers. (August 2011)

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Special education teachers are under tremendous pressure to deliver a personalized educational experience to special needs children while, at the same time, operating within an equal opportunity, politically driven educational system. Urban teachers are under even more constraints since urban public schools do not typically have the resources, materials, and support from parents needed to deliver the best possible educational experience to students. In 2000, Coleman suggested that caseloads followed closely by paperwork are the biggest concerns of special education teachers. This author further suggests that, on average, special education teachers prepare fifty lessons per day for special needs children, and spend one to two days per week managing paperwork. Budgetary constraints in urban schools further place obstacles in front of special education teachers who must make do with materials and training that are incomplete or out of date. Professional challenges may be the reason behind a lack of special education teachers in urban areas, and the fact that the demand for special education teachers was outpacing the number of special education teachers entering the

field. The purpose of this study is to explore five research questions that examine the antecedents to an urban elementary special education teacher's intentions to leave the special education profession. Five professional challenges were developed from extant literature to test their influence on job satisfaction and three constructs from the theory of planned behavior. Job satisfaction and these three constructs were tested for their predictive validity influencing a subject's behavior intention to leave the profession.

Using a non-random, purposeful sample of 79 certified special education teachers in urban Texan school districts, a quantitative method using multiple regression was used to test nine correlations. Results suggest that professional challenges significantly influence job satisfaction and perceived behavioral control from the theory of planned behavior. Behavior intention to leave the profession was significantly influenced by job satisfaction, attitudes about leaving the profession, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes about leaving the profession were significantly influenced by job satisfaction. The subjective norms construct was not a significant predictor of behavior intention, and neither attitude nor subjective norms was influenced by professional challenges.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Alex, who always believed in me. To my wonderful children, Rashard and Marshall, who never let me forget whatever one starts, one must finish.

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I would like to thank my committee members for providing guidance and support when I needed it most: Drs. Patricia J. Larke, Norvella Carter, Gewndolyn Webb-Hasan, and Lisa Bowman-Perrott. Dr. Hillary Standish, all of your reassurances, kind suggestions, and guidance will not be forgotten. I thank my dear friend John Garger. I could not have done this without you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, United States schools employed 473,000 special education teachers with projections of a 17% increase to 553,000 by 2018. Of these teachers, 226,000 special education teachers are employed at the elementary level with projections of a 20% increase to 270,300 by 2018 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). The state of Texas employs 320,000 teachers plus an additional 70,000 staff who serve 4.7 million students. According to the latest figures, Texas employs 31,516 special education teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Teaching is a difficult job but it is especially difficult for teachers who work in urban schools. These teachers face many challenges including underprepared students and poorly equipped schools. Many urban students come from single parent homes and most of these parents hold down two jobs leaving the teacher to act *in loco parentis*, meaning the teachers are not only responsible for the student's education but act as parents in the parents' absence (Lee, 1999). Kozol (1992) chronicled the plight of urban students and the schools they attend, describing school buildings as rundown and in desperate need of repair. He reported broken windows, leaky roofs, raw sewage in the streets, and out-dated and insufficient resources. Thirteen years later, Worthy (2005) identified the same problems in addition to limited administrative support as reasons why urban teachers are likely to leave the profession.

Special education teachers educate children who have a number of disabilities ranging from severe cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities to students who have mild to moderate disabilities such as mental retardation, emotional disturbance, multiple impairments, autism, and speech and language deficits. For students with mild to moderate disabilities, special education teachers often modify the general education curriculum based on students' individual learning styles and abilities. Special education teachers work in different environments; some special education teachers work in their own classrooms or in the general education classroom with a general education teacher to provide individualized assistance to students with disabilities. Others team-teach with general education teachers in a classroom that contains both general and special education students. Some special education teachers work with special education students just part of the day while others teach students who are homebound, hospitalized, or in other residential facilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

Colleges and universities throughout the United States offer a variety of special education programs. Some require four or five years of study and may include both general and specialized special education courses. All fifty states and the District of Columbia require special education teachers to be licensed but licensure is granted on a state-by-state basis. In response to the demand for special education teachers, many states - including Texas - award emergency and alternative licenses (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Texan teachers are required to hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, attend teacher training in an approved program, and complete the

appropriate teacher certification tests for the subject and grade level for which the teacher wishes to teach (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Unlike other countries facing similar special education issues, the United States operates within a diagnosis-driven framework for identifying discrepancy between students with special needs and students without special needs. Working within this “equal opportunity” and “civil rights” framework, U.S. urban teachers face several pertinent professional challenges that affect job satisfaction when delivering quality education to special needs children. The five professional challenges explored in this study include administrative support, parental support, access to relevant materials, access to training, and workload. In addition, the theory of planned behavior is used to assess the degree urban special education teachers believe they will remain special education teachers in the future. The implications of the relationships among the five professional challenges and job satisfaction are discussed and a framework for assessing the impact of these challenges and intention to remain special education teachers is presented.

According to Itkonen & Jahnukainen (2010), the United States constructs disability from a medical/diagnosis discrepancy model in which equal opportunity, civil rights laws, and social norms shape the framework for deciding whether a child is in need of special education and how that special education should be delivered to the student. Powell (2010) argues that disability classifications and categorical boundaries for those classifications are in constant flux making special education needs a moving target for educators and administrators of special education. Conderman and Pedersen

(2010) point out that legislation greatly influences the special education sector of education with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 being notable and recent examples. The result has been pressure on special education teachers to adapt quickly to changing political climates with respect to how special education should be shaped and delivered. The evaluation of what constitutes special education and children with special needs are out of the hands of the teachers. Politicians and laws determine the needs of the children aggregately and the teachers must respond to these demands on a student-by-student basis.

Statement of the Problem

Special education teachers are under tremendous pressure to deliver a personalized education experience to special needs children while at the same time operating within an equal opportunity, politically driven educational system. Urban teachers are under even more constraints since urban public schools do not typically have the resources, materials, and support from parents needed to deliver the best possible educational experience to students. Coleman (2000) suggests that caseloads followed closely by paperwork are the biggest concerns of special education teachers. This author further suggests that, on average, special education teachers prepare fifty lessons per day for special needs children and spend one to two days per week managing paperwork.

In various domains, job satisfaction emerged as an important construct with which to predict a variety of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. A study by Pisciotto (1999) suggests that treatment by administrators and student attitudes are better predictors of

teacher morale and satisfaction than insufficient financial compensation in public schools. Byrd-Blake, Afolayan, Hunt, Fabunmi, Pryor, and Leadner (2010) examined the effects of the pressures of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on special education teacher morale in urban school districts concluding that attitudes and perceptions of subjective norms are predictors of those pressures. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) suggest that emotional exhaustion - the kind brought on by too many professional challenges - influences negatively job satisfaction. Unlike those who teach in general education, special education teachers face a unique set of challenges that lead to intentions of leaving the profession. However, few empirical research studies examine how professional challenges relate to urban elementary special education teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction; little is known about the effect professional challenges have on special education teachers' intentions to leave the special education profession. This lack of relevant research constitutes a problem for investigation because so little on the subject appears in the literature.

Theoretical Base

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991) appears in hundreds of studies to evaluate several pertinent antecedents to a focal individual's behavior (Francis et al., 2004). More than just a theory, it is also an instrument designed to assess the antecedents of an individual's intention to behave in certain ways in the future. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced the theory of reasoned action to serve as a cognitive model capable of predicting actual behavior from behavior intentions. They suggest that behavioral attitudes and subjective norms are significant predictors of an individual's

intention to behave in some way. This intention accurately predicts the individual's choice to behave or not behave in that way. Not specific to any behavior, the theory of reasoned action has been used to predict various behaviors such as exercise in patients (Hunt & Gross, 2009), tourists' intention to try local cuisine (Ryu & Han, 2010), and nurses' intention to leave their current job to explain nursing shortages (Shwu-Ru, 2009).

In later research, Ajzen (1988) addressed a deficiency in the theory of reasoned action by adding the perceived behavioral control construct to the model. Until that time, the model did not address uncertainty inherent in any decision to behave or not behave in some way. By adding the assessment of control a focal individual perceives when it comes to behaving in some way, the model was strengthened and ultimately became the theory of planned behavior. A generalized predictor of future behavior, the theory of planned behavior is based on the premise that three antecedents capture significant variability in a focal individual's future behavior. First, attitude toward the behavior is assessed with two components: beliefs about consequences and related positive or negative judgments about the consequences of the behavior. Second, subjective norms, or the focal individual's assessment of the social pressures to perform the target behavior, are assessed with two components: beliefs about how pertinent people in the focal individual's life would like him/her to behave and the positive or negative judgments about these social pressures. Finally, perceived behavioral control, or the extent to which the focal individual believes he/she is capable of performing the behavior, is assessed with two components: how much control the focal individual has

over the behavior and how confident he/she feels that the behavior can be performed (Conner & Sparks, 1995; Godin & Kok, 1996).

In light of extant literature and the theory of planned behavior's ability to predict an individual's behavior, a significant portion of this study draws from the theory to examine and explain special education teachers' intention to leave the special education profession. In conjunction with job satisfaction and the professional challenges constructs acting as antecedents, this study tests a model that explains the attitudes and behavior intentions of special education teachers when it comes to leaving the field.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how professional challenges relate to the urban elementary special education teacher's job satisfaction and the effect those professional challenges have on the teacher's intention to leave the special education profession. Perceptions of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control relate to relevant variables that predict the special education teacher's intention to leave the profession.

Attitudes. Captures the special education teacher's beliefs about the consequences of leaving the special education profession and the positive or negative consequences of doing so.

Subjective Norms. Targets the special education teacher's beliefs about how the perceptions of relevant people in the teacher's life would view the teacher's decision to leave the profession and the positive and negative consequences of doing so.

Perceived Behavioral Control. Captures how much control the special education teacher believes he/she has over leaving the special education profession and how confident he/she feels that he/she could leave the profession.

Behavior Intention. Targets the degree the special education teacher believes he/she will leave the special education profession in the future.

Research Questions

The guiding research question for this study is: What professional challenges affect a teacher's intention to leave the profession as an urban elementary special education teacher? Supplemental items focusing on attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavior intention are also included. More specifically, the questions addressed in this study are:

1. How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction?
2. How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession?
3. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession?
4. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

5. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms appear frequently throughout this dissertation. The definitions provided below are offered to assist understanding of how these terms are used in this study.

Administrative Support - The level of commitment, guidance, and understanding administrators' exhibit to help special education elementary school teachers deliver quality education to students

Parental Support - The level of commitment, guidance, and understanding parents of special education children exhibit to help special education elementary school teachers deliver quality education to students.

Access to Relevant Materials - The ability of a special education elementary school teacher to acquire necessary apparatuses to deliver quality education to students.

Access to Training - The ability of a special education elementary school teacher to acquire additional education when needed to deliver quality education to students.

Workload - The amount of time and effort output necessary for a special education elementary school teacher to deliver quality education to students.

Job satisfaction - a special education elementary school teacher's belief that current job conditions are similar to perceived ideal job conditions.

Attitude - a special education elementary school teacher's beliefs about the positive or negative consequences of leaving the special education profession.

Subjective Norms - a special education elementary school teacher's beliefs about how the perceptions of relevant people in the teacher's life influence the teacher's decision to leave the special education profession.

Perceived Behavioral Control - a special education elementary school teacher's beliefs about whether or not he/she has the ability to leave the special education profession.

Behavior Intention - a special education elementary school teacher's beliefs about whether he/she will leave the special education profession.

Elementary Special Education Teachers - teachers certified in special education who work in grades pre-k to 6th grade and teach students who have mild to severe disabilities.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made while conducting this study:

1. The yielded inventory of responses represents honest and unbiased opinions and perceptions.
2. The research instrument was valid and reliable.

Limitations

1. The study was limited to urban elementary schools in Texas.
2. The results of the study can be generalized to participants teaching in urban elementary schools in Texas.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I includes an introduction, statement of the problem, theoretical base, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, and organization of the study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature concerning the conceptualization, characteristics, and the theoretical base that examine professional challenges of urban elementary special education teachers. The research methodology used in the study is outlined in Chapter III and Chapter IV presents the results. Finally, Chapter V contains an in-depth interpretation of results, recommendations, study limitations, suggestions for future research directions, and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it explores relevant literature surrounding the two topics of urban teachers and special education educators. The focus is on how these topics combine to predict an urban elementary special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. Second, the variables under study in this dissertation are introduced and shown to have relevance to the topic of special education teacher retention. Rather than concentrate on secondary, external variables such as compensation, this dissertation takes a cognitive approach that shows that cognitions predict a special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. Third, a model consisting of relevant variables is presented and justified by drawing from relevant literature. Using well-established theories from several fields, the model is developed and shown to contribute to the special education retention literature.

To explore the research questions this dissertation examines, a research model was developed to test whether professional challenges, job satisfaction, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the behavioral intentions of urban elementary special education teachers to leave their chosen profession. The model tested in this dissertation is shown in Figure 2.1. This model suggests that five professional challenges including administrative support, parental support, access to relevant materials, access to training, and workload predict job satisfaction, attitudes about leaving the profession, subjective norm influence about leaving the profession, and

the perceived behavioral control the teachers under study believe they possess when it comes to leaving the professional. In addition, job satisfaction is expected to predict a teacher's attitude about leaving the profession. Finally, the job satisfaction, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control constructs predict a teacher's intention to leave the profession.

A number of factors, findings, and suggestions present in extant literature influenced the model's development. The literature defines well some of these factors while others are still in their infancy. The concepts discussed in this chapter draw from a variety of disciplines including education, management, psychology, social psychology, and political science. The result is a model that is comprised of a complete view of the pertinent issues surrounding urban elementary teachers' intentions to leave the special education profession. What follows is a review of relevant literature that draws out the most important issues regarding development of the model. Specific references to the model shown in Figure 2.1 are pointed out. The reader may wish to refer to the model to understand better how extant literature was used to justify the constructs and relationships implied by the model.

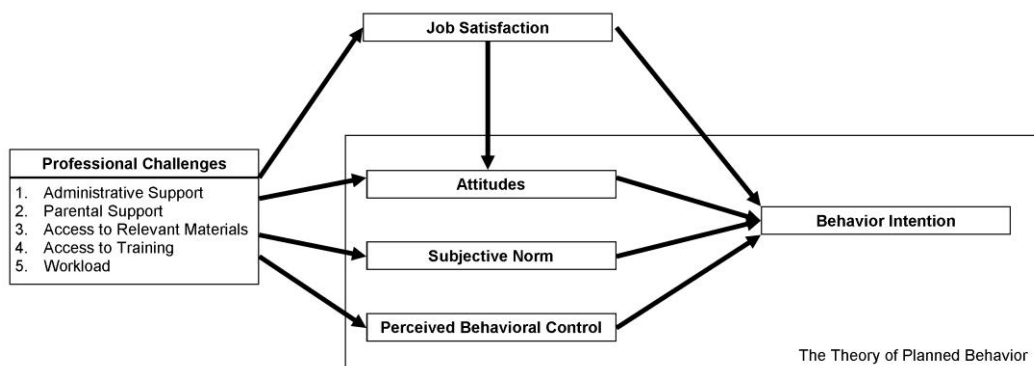


Figure 2.1. Proposed Research Model.

Special Education Research

Recent research into special education examines myriad issues including shortages of special education teachers of color (Ellmer, 2010), program efficiency and effectiveness (Robicheau, Haar, & Palladino, 2008), social skills instruction (Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Tincani, 2010), teacher quality and preparation (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010), special education web resources (Singh, 2010), and early career special educators (West & Hudson, 2010) to name a few. Clearly, special education is a topic that receives much attention due to the complex and dynamic elements involved in teaching students with special needs. It is also clear that researchers place much attention on the special education teacher in addition to the special needs student.

Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson (2010) suggest that federal regulations and other forces, both political and social, necessitate changes to prepare successfully special education teachers to deliver quality and effective education services to special needs students. These authors state that “to function effectively...and fulfill federal highly qualified teacher requirements, special education teachers must master an increasingly complex knowledge base and sophisticated repertoire of instructional practices” (p. 357). They conclude that current pre-service preparation does not prepare special education teachers to master these complexities and practices. Fish and Stephens (2010) examined the elements that contribute to urban special education teachers’ choice to pursue and remain special education teachers. They suggest that urban special education teachers perceive that school districts work to recruit teachers and those under

study indicated that retention of special education teachers requires administrative support, economic remuneration, and opportunities for further training. According to the subjects of the study, these elements are necessary to educate special education students effectively.

Urban special education teachers are under more pressure than general education teachers are when it comes to complying with the political climate surrounding special education. In addition, the two studies mentioned above suggest that there are elements external to special education teachers - elements out of their control - that influence a teacher's willingness and ability to remain special education educators. The remainder of this chapter draws out the most important of these elements and justifies the model tested in this dissertation. First, a deeper look into urban special education teachers is presented. Next, the political climate surrounding special education is explored. A discussion of the professional challenges specifically endured by urban special education teachers follows. The role of job satisfaction in urban special education teacher retention is examined. Finally, a well-established theory from the psychology and social psychology literature is used to frame further elements necessary to understand an urban special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. The chapter concludes with a summary of all that is discussed about urban special education teachers and their intentions to remain special education teachers.

Special Education in Urban Settings

As Fish and Stephens' (2010) study suggests, there are elements important to urban special education teachers that determine whether such a teacher remains in the

special education profession. Most interestingly, the research identifies administrative support as one of these determining elements. The significance of these finding points to external rather than internal variables that increase retention rates among the teachers.

Blanchett (2009) points out that:

Despite the fact that African American and other students of color, students labeled as having disabilities, and poor students in urban schools are indisputably linked in terms of the quality of schooling they have experienced, few attempts have been made to examine the relationship between special education and urban education. (p. 370)

The author further suggests that special education students and students who attend urban schools “have a long history of being miseducated, undereducated, and treated inequitably by the American educational system” (p. 370). The result is that the urban special education student is in double jeopardy of being educationally mistreated, disadvantaged, and incapable of receiving the type of education that he/she deserves and is mandated by law.

Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) suggest that general education, special education, and honors students are subjected to different interactions based on educational services, gender, and ethnic background. This demonstrates that further factors out of the control of special education teachers - factors specific to the students receiving the education - play a role in education quality. The result is a complex and dynamic environment in which special education teachers must learn to work and adapt while delivering quality, personalized education to students, all of whom have different needs. Ferri & Connor (2010) point out that although males of color make up the majority of students in special education programs, not enough is known “about how

being female shapes the experiences and understandings of young women of colour labelled disabled in schools” (p. 105). It is clear that gaps present in extant special education literature may be contributing to the misunderstandings of which elements influence directly quality special education and the variables necessary to retain urban special education teachers. Harr, Oliver, Ramanathan, and Socias (2008) suggest that delivery of urban special education services “is often the source of disputes between parents and districts and an issue in special education class-action lawsuits” (p. 58). They recognize that “despite these controversies, there has been little large-scale research on the delivery of services” (p. 58). Their study demonstrates that monitoring is a necessary component to ensure delivery of services and measurement of service effectiveness. It is clear that systems outside of the urban special education teachers' control are suggested as solutions to ensure districts and the teachers in them are delivering quality special education services and doing so in an adequately effective manner. More rules and requirements are being placed on these teachers with little input from the teachers themselves. Compliance at the aggregate level seems to be the dominant solution to making sure special education students receive the education mandated by law.

Extant special education literature recognizes that special education means different things to key stakeholders. Abell (2005) suggests that:

To the students and their parents, special education is a right - a claim on civic resources for an equal education under the law; to the community, it is an obligation to ensure fairness and an opportunity to level the playing field so that more and more students with disabilities can join the community of productive adults. (n.p.)

What is missing in the literature is the perspective of a key stakeholder - the urban special education teacher - charged with the task of delivering the type of education required of them from the different stakeholders. It is possible that these teachers are receiving mixed messages about the services they should deliver to special needs children. The result may be frustration, confusion, and complacency when it becomes clear that they cannot live up to each stakeholder's expectations simultaneously.

Frustration may lead to professional challenges that overcome the special education teacher and lead to thoughts and intentions of leaving the profession. Politics play a role in the professional challenges faced by urban special education teachers. In the following section, the special education political climate is discussed with special attention given to how this climate contributes to an urban special education teacher's professional challenges and how these challenges lead a teacher to consider leaving the special education profession.

Contemporary Issues of the Special Education Political Climate

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer comprehensive coverage of the political issues faced by the U.S., its states, districts, cities, schools, administrators, and special education teachers; the body of knowledge covering those issues is far too vast. However, the political climate of the issue of special education is particularly important when discussing special education teacher retention. The reasons are embedded in control over how teachers are to deliver customized special education programs at the individual special needs child level by complying with legal, ethical, moral, and fiduciary precepts out of the teacher's control. Perceptions of the type of special

education services that should be delivered and to whom they should be delivered are out of the hands of the special education teacher. Nevertheless, special education teachers are under constant scrutiny and judgment by the federal government, state governments, districts, cities, schools, administrators, fellow teachers, parents, and even the students to whom they are charged to deliver special education services.

Unlike other countries facing similar special education issues, the United States operates within a diagnosis-driven framework for creating discrepancy between students with special needs and students without special needs. Working within this equal opportunity and civil rights framework, U.S. urban teachers face several pertinent professional challenges that affect job satisfaction when delivering quality education to special needs children. According to Itkonen and Jahnukainen (2010), the United States constructs disability from a medical and diagnosis discrepancy model in which equal opportunity, civil rights laws, and social norms shape the framework for deciding whether a child is in need of special education and how that special education should be delivered. Powell (2010) argues that disability classifications and categorical boundaries for those classifications are in constant flux, making special education needs a moving target for educators and administrators of special education. Conderman and Pedersen (2010) point out that legislation greatly influences the special education sector of education with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 notable and recent examples. The result has been pressure on special education teachers to adapt quickly to changing political climates with respect to how special education should be shaped and delivered to special needs children (Zirkel,

2010). The evaluation of what constitutes special education and children with special needs (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010) is effectively out of the hands of the teachers; politicians and laws determine the needs of the children aggregately and the teachers must respond to these demands on a student-by-student basis. Liasidou (2009) suggests that “special educational policymaking is a discursive struggle, a power/knowledge interplay constituted within a realm of contradictory beliefs, values and discourses that frame the context within which the education of disabled children is envisioned and realized (p. 106).

Further complicating the special education political landscape is that, as Kauffman and Landrum (2009) point out, “individuals and opportunities must be insured, but doing so requires the discrimination of differences among differences. That is, not all differences require the same remedy to insure equal rights and opportunities” (p. 177). They point out that disproportionate representation places unnecessary constraints on special education services. It has also been argued that disproportionate representation leads to “the use of the legally accepted segregation of special education to maintain the effects of the unacceptable and illegal segregation by race” (Beratan, 2008, p. 337). This research demonstrates that legal requirements lead to undesirable results. Sometimes legal, ethical, and fiduciary responsibilities are at odds when it comes to delivering the “right” education to special education students. A study by Stone and Zirkel (2010) demonstrates that it is possible for school officials to have “followed the ethical precept of advocacy but did so in a way that collided with legal protections” (p. 244).

There is no doubt that the special education political climate is a complicated environment with which special education teachers must deal. Special education teachers must deliver individualized programs to special needs children while at the same time comply with not only demands mandated by law, but also with those imposed by the many stakeholders - administrators, parents, fellow teachers, students - closely involved in the delivery of quality special education services. The pressures of complying with all of these demands are theorized in this dissertation to contribute to an urban special education teacher's intentions to leave the special education profession. To accurately study these pressures, five relevant professional challenges were identified in the literature that contribute to cognitions and intentions of leaving the profession. These professional challenges are discussed and developed in the following sections.

Professional Challenges

The professional challenges discussed below were expected to behave as antecedents to an urban elementary special education teacher's intentions to leave the profession. More specifically, they were expected to influence the teacher's job satisfaction, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving a special education career. It was necessary to discuss and justify these concepts and formally develop them into testable constructs. What follows is a discussion of each of the five professional challenges as they appear in the literature and a justification for using them as constructs that influence thoughts of leaving the special education profession.

Administrative Support

Nir (2007) points out that few extant studies examine the connection between administrative encouragement and the professional development of teachers. The few that do exist demonstrate that administrative support is a key element in predicting teacher turnover. Russell, Williams, and Gleason-Gomez (2010) suggest that administrators' coordinating skills influence teachers' cognitions of leaving and commitment to their jobs. A study that took place in South Texas by Otto and Arnold (2005) suggests "that 'lack of administrative support' [is] an important reason for [special education teachers] leaving the profession" (p. 253). They conclude that their findings are consistent with those found in previous literature.

Gerston, Keating, Yonvanof, and Harniss (2001) report that administrative support relieves frustrations experienced by special education teachers. They argue that understanding the special education teacher's role in delivering services to special needs children is the most important role played by the administrator. Such administrative roles play a part not only in the socialization processes between teachers and administrators, they play a role in decision-making processes. Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008) found that administrative support is a key element in the inclusion of special education students into regular education classrooms. Some administrative support comes from new teacher indoctrination. Wiebke and Bardin (2009) suggest that lack of support is a factor often cited by new teachers as a reason for leaving the teaching profession. Further results reported by these authors include that induction programs offered by administrators influences teacher attrition.

Clearly, administrators play multiple roles in the development and retention of teachers. Most importantly, they represent the first layer of management and leadership for special education teachers. Unlike politicians, lawmakers, advocates, and other influential stakeholders, administrators are in direct contact with special education teachers; their influence is undeniably important in shaping a teacher's perceptions and cognitions about myriad on-the-job issues. Administrative support is expected to play a significant role in an urban special education teacher's intention to leave the profession.

Parental Support

A study by Lagace-Seguin and Case (2010) suggests that parental involvement - both pressure and support - predicts elementary school children's well-being and academic competence. This is not surprising given that students with supportive parents are likely to do better academically than students whose parents are not actively involved in their child's academic process. Hein and Wimer (2007) reported that parental support is a significant predictor of homework completion and student motivation. Again, this is not surprising since homework completion and academic motivation are important contributors to a student's learning and academic growth process.

Wong (2008) argues that parental involvement is a predictor of academic performance when self-regulation mediates the relationship. Here we see that the path to academic performance starts with parental involvement and flows through self-regulation behaviors. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that a student's cognitive process and behavior are the links between involvement and performance. By providing support to their children, parents simultaneously support the

teacher by ensuring that academic success is not left entirely up to the teacher. Parental support, therefore, relieves teachers of the entire academic burden.

Wong (2008) suggests special education represents a significantly different case when it comes to parental support of students. Students with special needs require assistance that can be difficult to understand and administer by teachers and parents of such children. It is possible that parents of special needs children misunderstand the role of the special education teacher as much as they misunderstand the needs of the child. Parents of special needs children may misconstrue the kind of support special education teachers need in order to deliver special education services to their children. This misapplication and misunderstanding places a heavier burden on the teacher as he/she must now deliver the correct education services to the special needs child whether the parent perceives that they are the correct services or not. The result can be added stress and feelings of resentment for having to shoulder the entire academic burden of teaching special needs children. This is amplified in urban environments where teacher to student ratios tend to be greater. Parental support is expected to be a predictor of a teacher's attitudes about leaving the special education profession.

Access to Relevant Materials

Kaufhold, Alvarez, and Arnold (2006) suggest that a lack of relevant supplies, materials, and resources is a source of frustration and burnout for special education teachers. Abel and Sewell (1999) even report that special education teachers sometimes support their students by personally buying materials and supplies for classroom use. Leko and Smith (2010) suggest that when special education teachers move from the pre-

service stage to their first teaching jobs, they are in a “uniquely tenuous position” (p. 321). This position can lead these special education teachers to leave their jobs after only a short time with the school. Welcoming the first-time special education teacher transition can be made easier “by focusing on the instructional and material needs of beginning special educators that match their varied teaching assignments” (p. 321). These authors note that like many new teachers, new special education teachers lack confidence. In fact, special education teachers experience lower levels of confidence due to the sensitive nature of delivering special education services with so many stakeholders involved.

Extant research suggests that a lack of access to relevant educational materials is one of the most often cited problems for special education teachers (Billingsley & Tomchinm, 1992; Mastropieri, 2001). Billingsley, Carlson, and Klein (2004) suggest that about 33% of new special education teachers believe that they lack the materials necessary to deliver quality education to special needs children. In some studies, teachers report several reasons for this deficiency including no materials at all, missing teacher's manuals, outdated materials, no access to materials, and a lack of understanding about where to go for materials (Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006). Many special education teachers are left to use what they have on hand or purchase materials themselves to make up for a lack of materials provided to them. The result can be resentment, frustration, and a feeling that they are not being supported in delivering education services to special needs children. As a source of frustration for special

education teachers, access to relevant materials is expected to help form perceptions about leaving the profession.

Access to Training

Access to materials does not help a special education teacher if that teacher lacks the training and expertise to deliver a personalized curriculum to each special needs child. Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson (2010) note that to fulfill federal, highly-qualified teacher requirements, special education teachers must master an increasingly complex knowledge base and sophisticated repertoire of instructional practices.

Billingsley (2010) argues that many new special education teachers believe they are ill prepared to fulfill all of the needs of their students given the complexity that each student's needs add to the teacher's duties and requirements. The literature clearly recognizes that special education teachers may not possess the skills and training to deliver quality education to their students. Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, and Kilgore (2005) argue that some special education teachers are surprised to find that they are required to teach material with which they have little to no experience; these teachers must learn the material along with their students. Some teachers are obliged to spend their own time outside of class learning the material so they can competently deliver special education services to their students as mandated by the curriculum they are required to follow (Gerke & Murri, 2006).

Without access to training, some special education teachers may lack the confidence they need to feel comfortable teaching special needs children. This lack of confidence can lead to beliefs that the teacher is incapable of teaching these students.

The result may be a tendency to develop intentions to leave the profession. Perceptions about necessary access to training are expected to help form perceptions about leaving the profession.

Workload

Woltmann and Camron (2009) argue that a poor working condition - like one that includes large, unmanageable caseloads and increasing administrative paperwork requirements - is the predominant rationale for the persistent challenge of shortages in special education personnel. Hobson, Giannakaki, and Chambers (2009) suggest that workload is a main cause of withdrawal from initial teacher preparation programs. Antoniou, Polychroni, Kotroni (2009) found that workload is one of five key stressors experienced by teachers in special education. Clearly, workload is a possible variable leading to behavior intentions of leaving the special education profession.

In a study of speech-language pathologists, Hutchins, Howard, Prelock, and Belin (2010) found that increased levels of workload interfere with delivery of educational services and impact retention of teachers in the field. Similarly, Nance and Calabrese (2009) found that tenured special education teachers believe the workload imposed by mandatory state assessments overwhelms them. In the discussion of their findings, the authors illuminate the importance of drawing from the experience of such tenured teachers to retain them.

The literature also examines factors that lead to special education teacher burnout and the incentives that draw such teachers back into the profession. Many special education teachers who have already left the profession indicate that there exist no

incentives for them to return (Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). Once again, workload is one of the most salient contributing factors cited for the attrition and retention problems associated with special education teachers. Interestingly, Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) discuss that “there is evidence in this body of research that some teachers are leaving special education classrooms and choosing to teach in general education classes, while there is no evidence of the reverse phenomenon” (p. 36).

In any work environment, overwork is a contributing factor to cognitions and eventual behavior intentions of leaving a job or even a profession altogether. Given that special education teachers have the option to leave the special education profession but still remain teachers in a regular classroom, intentions to leave the profession for this group may be easier to form and act on. Workload is expected to contribute to the behavior intentions of special education teachers to leave the profession and seek another teaching job, an administrative role that takes them out of the classroom, or even an entirely new career.

One of the more salient aspects of workload is the bureaucracy that creates the paperwork required from special education teachers. Bureaucracy affects urban elementary special education teachers in three compounding ways. First, paperwork is a significant part of any special education teacher’s daily routine regardless of location or class size. Second, paperwork is often associated with younger students. As elementary teachers, the subjects of this study are particularly vulnerable to paperwork overload. Finally, the subjects of this study work in a particularly large urban district, the fourth largest in the nation. Paperwork finds its way to these teachers from multiple sources

including the federal, state, county, city, district, and local levels. These three components combine to create a seemingly never-ending trail of paperwork, work that takes away from lesson planning, direct contact with students, and the ability to connect with parents to develop individualized educational strategies to address the needs of the student. Bureaucracy in the form of paperwork and workload may have the opposite effect intended, taking teachers away from the delivery of education and toward its measurement and accounting.

Job Satisfaction

In various domains, job satisfaction has emerged as an important construct with which to predict a variety of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. A study by Pisciotta (1999) suggests that treatment by administrators and student attitudes are better predictors of teacher morale and satisfaction than insufficient financial compensation in public schools. Byrd-Blake et al. (2010) examined the effects of the pressures of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on special education teacher morale in urban school districts concluding that attitudes and perceptions of subjective norms are predictors of those pressures. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) suggest that emotional exhaustion - the kind brought on by too many professional challenges - negatively influences job satisfaction. Unlike those who teach in general education, special education teachers face a unique set of challenges that can lead to intentions of leaving the profession. However, few empirical research studies examine how professional challenges relate to urban elementary special education teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction; little is known about the effect professional challenges have on special education teachers' intentions to

leave the special education profession. This lack of relevant research constitutes a problem for investigation because so little on the subject appears in the literature.

Among the few studies that examine job satisfaction and retention of special education teachers directly, Hutchins et al. (2010) found that job satisfaction predicts retention of special education teachers. Adera and Bullock's study of special education teachers (2010) suggests that "stressors within and outside the classrooms were responsible for high levels of stress and dissatisfaction, which eventually translate into teacher transfers or migration to other professions" (p. 5). Leko and Smith (2010) argue that when it comes to new special education teachers, administrators influence these teachers' intentions to leave stressful working conditions in the classroom with the result of lowering attrition rates. They call for teacher, administrator, and parental cooperation to establish a supportive environment for new special education teachers. Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) similarly call for reforms that improve job satisfaction as a method for reducing the special education teacher shortage.

From the management literature, Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman (2010) discuss the misperception that salary is the driving force behind employee turnover. Using an evidence-based approach, these authors conclude that "pay level and pay satisfaction are relatively weak predictors of individual turnover decisions" and "key attitudes such as job satisfaction... [are a] relatively strong predictor" (p. 49). They argue that the relationship a subordinate has with his/her immediate supervisor is a critical indicator in the decision to quit and find other employment. This argument bolsters the importance

of examining the role of administrative support as a professional challenge with a special education teacher's intention to leave the profession.

Harris, Winskowski, and Engdahl (2007) provide further evidence suggesting that social support is an important predictor of both job satisfaction and job tenure. Specifically, career mentoring and task support are the two most important social support variables that predict job satisfaction; coaching and task support are the two that predict job tenure. Here emerges the concept that support - in numerous forms - is an important predictor of job satisfaction. Looking back on the five professional challenges examined in this dissertation, it is clear that each involves some type of support whether it is from administrators, parents, access to materials and training, or workload. Overcoming all of these challenges requires support in addition to input provided by the special education teachers themselves. It is appropriate and supported in the literature that professional challenges predict a special education teacher's job satisfaction.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991) appears in hundreds of studies to evaluate several pertinent antecedents to a focal individual's behavior (Francis et al., 2004). More than just a theory, it is also an instrument designed to assess the antecedents of an individual's intention to behave in certain ways in the future. Refined and retested over a number of years and studies, the theory is a major contributor to models designed to predict behavior. The strength of the model comes from its ability to predict behavior without any necessary conditions or restraints on the kind of the behavior under examination. In this study, the focal behavior is an urban elementary

special education teacher's intention to leave the special education profession. What follows is a brief history of the theory of planned behavior and a discussion of its relevance and appropriateness for the study of special education teachers.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced the theory of reasoned action to serve as a cognitive model capable of predicting actual behavior from behavior intentions. These researchers argued that behavioral attitudes and subjective norms are significant predictors of an individual's intention to behavior in some way. This intention accurately predicts the individual's choice to behave or not behave in that way. Not specific to any behavior, the theory of reasoned action has been used to predict various behaviors such as exercise in patients (Hunt & Gross, 2009), tourists' intention to try local cuisine (Ryu & Han, 2010), and nurses' intention to leave their current job to explain nursing shortages (Shwu-Ru, 2009). In later research, Ajzen (1988) addressed a deficiency in the theory by adding perceived behavioral control to the model. Until that time, the model didn't address uncertainty inherent in any decision to behave or not behave in some way. By adding the assessment of control a focal individual perceives when it comes to behaving in some way, the model was strengthened and ultimately became the theory of planned behavior.

A generalized predictor of future behavior, the theory of planned behavior is based on the premise that three antecedents capture significant variability in a focal individual's future behavior. First, attitude toward the behavior is assessed by two components: beliefs about consequences and related positive or negative judgments about the consequences of the behavior. Second, subjective norms, or the focal

individual's assessment of the social pressures to perform the target behavior, are assessed by two components: beliefs about how pertinent people in the focal individual's life would like him/her to behave and the positive or negative judgments about these social pressures. Finally, perceived behavioral control, or the extent to which the focal individual believes he/she is capable of performing the behavior, is assessed by two components: how much control the focal individual has over the behavior and how confident he/she feels that the behavior can be performed (Conner & Sparks, 1995; Godin & Kok, 1996).

In light of extant literature and the theory of planned behavior's ability to predict an individual's behavior, a significant portion of this study relies on the theory to examine and explain special education teachers' intention to leave the special education profession. In conjunction with job satisfaction and the professional challenges constructs acting as antecedents, this study tests a model that explains the attitudes and behavior intentions of special education teachers when it comes to leaving the field. A brief discussion of the theory's appropriateness in this context is warranted.

In the theory of planned behavior, three constructs (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) act as antecedents to behavior intention. However, when it comes to special education teachers, more information is needed to assess if the theory serves as a tool to understand what elements contribute to a special education teacher's intentions to leave the profession. This study examines more than just the constructs found in the theory; it provides a complete picture consisting not only of outcomes, but of the specific causes of those outcomes. Antecedents to attitudes,

subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are necessary to apprehend the causes that lead to failure to retain special education teachers.

The model in Figure 2.1 shows that professional challenges are constructs that predict the variables found to predict behavior intentions in the theory of planned behavior. In addition, job satisfaction is predicted to influence not only attitudes, but to have direct influence on the behavior intention of a special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. These additions to the theory of planned behavior contribute to the theory by making it more specific to the variables identified in the literature that specifically affect a special education teacher. Therefore, the model tested in this study is an extension of the theory that turns it from a general study of behavior intentions to one that is specific to special education teachers. It is the purpose of this research to contribute to the literature pertaining to special education retention by using grounded, but general, theories coupled with extensions identified in the literature as pertinent to this subject.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was threefold: 1) explore relevant urban and special education teacher literature, 2) introduce the variables under study in this dissertation, and 3) present a model for examining special education teachers working in urban settings. As the discussion indicates, the special education literature covers a vast number of subjects, each one contributing to our understanding of the pressures, inconsistencies, and costs of remaining a special education teacher. Particularly

important to these themes is the concept that there are many stakeholders when it comes to delivering quality special education services to special needs children.

Added to this discussion were the complexities afforded by special education teachers working in an urban settings. The most salient subjects of that discussion were the notions of under-education and unequal treatment that are part of an urban special education student's world. Guided and mandated by the special education political climate found in this country, several professional challenges were identified in the literature that adversely affect a special education teacher's perceptions of the rewards associated with remaining a special education teachers. It is these perceptions that are the focus of this study. In addition to these professional challenges is the well-established effect job satisfaction has on retention of qualified employees and the effect job satisfaction has on the thoughts these employees have about remaining at their current jobs or professions. To tackle these issues with urban special education teachers as the focus, the theory of planned behavior is used to predict how professional challenges and job satisfaction combine to predict a special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. Particularly interesting when it comes to special education teachers is the ability of these educators to move away from a special education environment to a general classroom setting. This way, they remain teachers and do not have to face the possibility of unemployment due to a complete profession change. The ease with which a special education teacher switches to a similar profession adds a unique variable to the study of retention.

Using the model presented in Figure 2.1, the remainder of this dissertation is dedicated to revealing how the model was tested, reporting the results of the study, and discussing how this information can be used to understand the antecedents to an urban special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. The next chapter reveals how the study was conducted and what specific procedures, methodologies, and statistics were employed to test the model and answer the research questions presented in Chapter I.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology used in this dissertation. This study included the testing of a research model introduced in Chapter II. The model tests the antecedents that predict an urban elementary special education teacher's intentions to leave the profession. Testing the model involved the collection of relevant constructs, calculation of key statistics, and reporting on the findings of the study. This chapter details these three elements of this dissertation and discusses the rationale for conducting this study. During the course of the investigation, the researcher followed the guidelines set forth in the Sixth Edition of the American Psychological Association's publication manual (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2009).

The project detailed in this dissertation consisted of two components. First, a pilot study was conducted. This step was taken in an effort to ensure that the measures developed specifically for this dissertation exhibited appropriate statistical attributes to adequately estimate the constructs tested in the model. The second part of the investigation consisted of the primary study, which included collecting relevant data, testing the model presented and developed in the previous chapter, interpreting the data and discussing the implications of the results.

It is understood that no research program is perfect; each has its own inherent limitations and this study was no exception. The purpose of this chapter is to describe a

methodology that meets the following requirements. First, it must include a method for collecting data that are both relevant to the present research and capable of testing the model developed in the previous chapter. Second, it must make use of robust quantitative statistical methods that accurately discriminate between effects that are substantive and those that are the results of random error. This includes statistical methods that are capable of suggesting both reliable measures and examination of relevant relationships. Finally, it must make interpretation of results unambiguous and ready for discussion so interested parties can benefit from the information obtained from this research. The remainder of this chapter describes a research program that - through sound adoption of extant research methods - meets these requirements, candidly identifies limitations, and answers the following research questions:

1. How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction?
2. How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession?
3. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession?
4. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

5. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was twofold. First, it justified the use of the measures developed in this dissertation by demonstrating that the items collected adequately represented estimation of the constructs under study. Second, it pointed out that the study was worth undertaking by showing that the constructs under examination were related statistically to one another. By satisfying these two criteria, the reader is assured that care was taken not to make assumptions about the validity of the constructs captured on a survey. The procedures for the pilot study mirrored those of the dissertation described below. Thirty subjects were solicited to take part in the pilot study, which was about 40% of the planned number of participants for the study.

Convergent validity refers to the ability of a collection of related items to represent accurately an underlying construct (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Carmines & Zeller, 1979). This study used latent variables, variables that cannot be measured directly. It was necessary that the items developed to measure the constructs could be demonstrated statistically. Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) was used to measure how well the items that estimate the underlying constructs converged on each construct. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, often referred to as reliability in extant literature. The alpha coefficient is a standardized score of internal reliability that ranges from 0 to 1 (Cronbach, 1951). Higher scores represent higher

levels of reliability among the items estimating a construct. It is typical in social science research to expect at least half of the variability in a test of reliability to account for measurement of the underlying construct. In terms of Cronbach's alpha, this equals a coefficient of about 0.7071. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) recommend that:

For purposes of clinical testing, reliability coefficients of approximately .85 or higher may be considered as indicative of dependable psychological tests [and]...in experimental research, instruments with much lower reliability coefficients may be accepted as satisfactory. (p. 50)

According to this information, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 or higher is ideal and a coefficient of 0.7071 is adequate for established measures. However, this dissertation used measures created for this particular study. Except for the pilot study, no information existed as to the reliability that could be expected when using these measures. Using the recommendations offered by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991), a reliability coefficient of 0.50 or higher was considered adequate for the custom measures developed for this study. The target reliability coefficient for the established construct, job satisfaction, was 0.7071 or higher. Constructs exhibiting reliabilities lower than these target coefficients were reexamined to determine which items for a given construct were not adequately measuring the underlying construct. At that time, a determination was made whether to eliminate the item(s) to raise the reliabilities above the target levels.

The pilot study served as justification for proceeding with the dissertation. In addition to demonstrating measurement reliability and accuracy, the pilot study also offered evidence that relationships exist among constructs, thereby justifying the cost in time, money, and effort to proceed with the study. Means, standard deviations, and

bivariate (Pearson r) correlations (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2007) from the pilot study are provided to suggest conducting the dissertation is justified and should proceed.

Study Methods

Unlike the pilot study, which was conducted only to validate the measures used in this dissertation, the methods used in the study included procedures used to analyze and present results related to the relationships among constructs in the model developed in the previous chapter. In this section, the design of the study is explained including a description of participants, the instrument used to collect constructs, calculations to estimate those constructs, procedures for collecting the data, data analysis and statistical techniques, and presentation of results.

Design of the Study

A survey research design was adopted for this study for several reasons. First, little research dealing with antecedents to urban elementary special education teachers leaving the profession exists. The best design for a study targeting such an underexposed phenomenon is one that includes a large sample and a larger scope of participants (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). The survey method allows for the capture of a more diverse array of subjects lending validity, reliability, and credibility to findings and subsequent recommendations offered to the scientific community (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2009).

Second, data collection from and research based on surveys is accurate in its ability to describe a population and less expensive than other designs (Kerlinger, 1992). Third, a survey design that incorporates quantitative analyses includes the advantage of

being more objective, more externally valid, and more internally consistent from subject to subject in comparison to qualitative studies that often rely on researcher interpretation to derive value from data (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2007; cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

This study examined several latent cognitive variables rather than variables that are directly observable (Byrne, 1998, 2001). They are better captured with multiple rather than single indicators. A survey design allows for the rapid collection of many such indicators to ensure a broad range of items is collected per construct (Bollen, 1989).

Participants

The purpose of this study was to examine the antecedents that predict an urban elementary special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. Therefore, only individuals who met the following three criteria were deemed appropriate for this study. The participants had to be; 1) certified special education teachers in an urban setting, 2) grades K through six, and 3) currently teaching special education students. To find such qualified volunteers, two districts were identified in an urban area of Texas, USA that would likely contain teachers who met these criteria. Permission was obtained from school administrators to solicit subjects for the study. Contact with the administrators served two purposes. Besides alerting the administrators to the solicitation, the administrators also provided information on which individual schools would likely yield prospective subjects. This information helped identify which schools to solicit first.

To disguise the districts used in this study and protect the confidentiality of the participants, the districts are herein generically referred to as District A and District B. According to the Texas Education Agency (2011), 12,027 teachers educated 200,944

students in District A in 2010. Of these individuals, 16,182 students were enrolled in special education programs and taught by 1,039 certified special education teachers. The student to teacher ratio in District A was 16.7:1 and the special education student to special education teacher ratio was 15.6:1 for 2010. District B had 62,532 students educated by 4,238 teachers in 2010. Of these individuals, 4,391 students were enrolled in special education programs and taught by 386 certified special education teachers. The student to teacher ratio in District B was 14.8:1 and the special education student to special education teacher ratio was 11.4:1 for 2010 (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Table 3.1 summarizes these demographics.

Table 3.1

Teacher/Student Demographics by District

	District	
	A	B
Number of Students	200,944	62,532
Number of Teachers	12,027	4,238
Student to Teacher Ratio	16.7 to 1	14.8 to 1
Number of SPED Students	16,182	4,391
Number of SPED Teachers	1,039	386
SPED Student to SPED Teacher Ratio	15.6 to 1	11.4 to 1

The target number of participants for the study was eighty while the target number of participants for the pilot study was thirty. Since the procedures for the collection of both the main study and pilot studies were identical and since no additions to the study were planned, it was determined that the data from the thirty pilot study participants would be folded into the data from the study participants to increase the total number of subjects for the overall study. This offers the advantage of both increasing external validity due to a higher number of participants and decreasing the amount of individual solicitation necessary to obtain a significant number of study participants.

Instrument

A survey instrument was developed to collect both demographic data and items pertaining to the constructs tested in the model presented and developed in the last chapter. The survey used in this dissertation is shown in Appendix A. The first part of the survey captured five demographic variables germane to this study including gender, age (years and months), ethnicity, special education teaching experience (years and months), and education level.

The second part captured ten constructs by using forty-nine items. All items from this section were scored by subjects using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree. The survey consisted of fifty-four items and it was estimated that completion of the survey would take no more than ten to fifteen minutes. The survey was collected with a pencil and paper method. Completed surveys for both the pilot and main studies were later transcribed to a statistical software application for analysis. This collection method was chosen to simplify the process for

subjects and avoid any confusion that may have contributed to a response set and skewed responses (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991).

Measurement of Constructs

Measurement of constructs in this study included a validated instrument for collecting job satisfaction, creation of an instrument for the constructs related to professional challenges, and use of a manual for developing items related to the theory of planned behavior. In total, forty-nine items measured the constructs used in the model examined in this study. Below is a detailed description of the items that appeared on the survey and an account of how the items were used to calculate scale scores and estimate the underlying constructs they measured.

Professional challenges. The professional challenges construct consisted of the five sub-constructs of administrative support (four items), parental support (four items), access to relevant materials (four items), access to training (four items), and workload (four items). The twenty items for these sub-constructs were developed from the literature discussed in the last chapter. To ensure the integrity of the data, two items from each of the constructs were written in the negative and two were written in the positive. Two items from each construct were reverse coded so that higher scores corresponded to higher levels of professional challenges faced by the subjects. Sample items from the professional challenges construct included “The administrators at my job understand my role as a special education teacher” and “The classrooms at my school are inadequate to deliver quality education to my students.”

This study focuses on professional challenges as antecedents to job satisfaction, attitudes about leaving the special education profession, influences of subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. It does not focus on the impact of each specific professional challenge on the endogenous variables. Therefore, all of the sub-constructs were aggregated to arrive at one estimation of each subject's perceptions of the professional challenges he/she faces as an urban elementary special education teacher. An average of all twenty items from the sub-constructs was calculated to estimate the professional challenges construct.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured with five items from Moe, Pazzaglia, and Ronconi (2010). According to these authors, job satisfaction can be both an overall variable and one specific to teachers. They sought a measure that was independent of context and ultimately modified a Satisfaction with Life Scale from Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to pertain specifically to teachers. Rather than measure job satisfaction directly, the items from this scale ask the subject to compare aspects of their current job with a theoretical and ideal one (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Items from the scale include “In most ways, my job is close to my ideal” and “If I could live my life over, I would not change the choices made in my job.” Since multiple items were used to measure job satisfaction, an average of the five items was calculated to estimate the construct.

Attitudes. The attitudes construct is one of the variables from the theory of planned behavior. Like all of the constructs from this theory, a manual created by Francis et al. (2004) guided development of the items used to measure attitudes.

According to the manual, knowing whether a subject is in favor of doing something, the attitude, is a necessary component to understanding whether that subject intends to behavior in some way (e.g. leave a profession).

Attitudes are measured using paired items, one that measures behavioral beliefs and one that measures an evaluation of the outcome. For this study, six items (three behavioral beliefs and three evaluations of outcomes) were developed to measure the attitudes construct. This results in three pairings. Scoring the attitudes construct involves calculating the product of each behavioral belief item and its corresponding outcome evaluation item and summing the resulting products. The formula used to estimate the attitudes construct was:

$$A = (b1 \times e1) + (b2 \times e2) + (b3 \times e3) \quad (1)$$

where A is the attitudes score; b1, b2, and b3 are the behavioral belief items; and e1, e2, and e3 are the outcome evaluations. An example behavioral belief item was “Finding another teaching job would make me happier than I am now” and its corresponding outcome evaluation item was “Being happy at my job is important to me.” The final attitudes score is a summative estimate of each subject's attitude toward leaving the special education profession.

Subjective norms. Similar to the attitudes construct, subjective norms is a variable associated with the theory of planned behavior. It represents the social pressures on a subject to either behave or not behave in a certain way. The construct is measured

using paired items, one that measures normative beliefs and one that measures motivation to comply. For this study, six items (three normative beliefs and three motivations to comply) were developed to measure the subjective norms construct. This results in three pairings. Scoring the subjective norms construct involves calculating the product of each normative belief items and its corresponding motivation to comply item and summing the resulting products. The formula used to estimate the subjective norms construct was:

$$SN = (n1 \times m1) + (n2 \times m2) + (n3 \times m3) \quad (2)$$

where SN is the subjective norm score; n1, n2, and n3 are the normative belief items; and m1, m2, and m3 are the motivation to comply items. An example normative belief item was “The administrators at my school would think that I should stay at my present job” and its corresponding motivation to comply item was “What the administrators at my school think is important to me.” The final subjective norms score is a summative estimate of each subject's perception of social pressure to leave the special education profession.

The subjective norm construct is unlike other variables in the theory of planned behavior because it is up to the researcher to decide which sources of social pressures most influence a subject to engage in the focal behavior. It is possible for social pressures to come from a variety of sources including family, friends, co-workers, superiors, subordinates, peers, and even strangers depending on the nature of the

research. For this study, three sources of social pressures were identified. These three sources were chosen because they represent likely influencers when a subject perceives the desire to leave the special education profession. These sources include the subject's administrators, family, and co-workers. The six items used to measure the subjective norm construct includes three pairings, one pairing for each source.

Perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control is a variable from the theory of planned behavior. It represents the degree a subject believes that he/she is capable of performing some behavior. The construct is measured using paired items, one that measures control beliefs and one that measures the influence of control beliefs. For this study, six items (three control beliefs and three influences of control beliefs) were developed to measure the perceived behavioral control construct. This results in three pairings. Scoring the perceived behavioral control construct involves calculating the product of each control belief item and its corresponding influence of control beliefs item and summing the resulting products. The formula used to estimate the perceived behavioral control construct was:

$$PBC = (c1 \times i1) + (c2 \times i2) + (c3 \times i3) \quad (3)$$

where PBC is the perceived behavioral control score; c1, c2, and c3 are the control belief items; and i1, i2, and i3 are the influence of control belief items. The final perceived behavioral control score is a summative estimate of each subject's perception of control over the focal behavior.

Behavior intention. Behavior intention is a variable from the theory of planned behavior. It estimates how likely a subject is to behave in some way. The construct is measured using items that focus directly on the behavior being examined. For this study, six items pertaining to a subject's intention to leave the special education profession were developed. Example items include “I expect to leave the special education profession in the near future” and “I intend to find another teaching job soon.” Although the theory of planned behavior does not place limits on how far into the future the intention to behave in some way must lay, behavior intention items used in this study focused on the intention or desire to leave the special education profession in the present and near future. In this way, intentions to leave the profession are more closely tied to the antecedents examined in this study. To estimate the behavioral control construct according to the manual, a mean of the six items was calculated for each subject.

Data Collection

Collection of data was conducted under the recommendations made by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2009) and the requirements of the Human Subjects' Protection Program at Texas A&M University. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) located at Texas A&M University summarily approved the conduction of this dissertation. Before participation in the study, potential subjects were required to read and sign the consent form shown in Appendix B. The consent form clearly indicated both the purpose of the study and what potential subjects would be asked to do should they decide to participate. Potential subjects were informed that any risks associated with participation were minimal and that no direct benefits were

expected. The consent form also informed potential subjects that participation was voluntary and that relations with Texas A&M, the district, and the school would be unaffected by refusal to participate. Potential subjects were informed that participation in the study was anonymous and that all data collected would be kept private. Finally, potential subjects were informed of whom to contact for more information and to learn about their rights as a research participant. A signature at the end of the consent form served as agreement to participate in the study. For their own records, subjects were given a copy of the consent form.

The present researcher administered collection of data at each subject's place of employment. This method ensured that procedures for solicitation to participate were uniform across all data collections and that someone familiar with the research was available in case any subjects had questions pertaining to the consent form, the survey, or participation in the study. Subjects were given the survey and were allowed ample time to fill it out at their leisure. Collection took place in a private room where subjects could adequately concentrate on the survey. As subjects completed the survey, all materials were collected and placed in the protection of the present researcher.

Data Analysis and Presentation

This section describes the data analyses that were carried out to test the model and answer the research questions that form the basis and justification for this study. The purpose of the data analysis was to describe certain data with descriptive statistics and test relationships with inferential statistics. A statistical analysis software package for a

desktop computer was used to calculate all construct estimates, descriptive information, and fit measures.

Descriptive statistics. A number of demographic items were included in the survey used to collect data for this study. The first analysis presented is the descriptive statistics related to gender, age, ethnicity, special education teaching experience, and education level. Means and standard deviations of the age and special education teaching experience are provided. These data serve two purposes. First, they help set the context under which the study was conducted. Second, they provide insight into how the study can be improved in future research and serve as input data for meta-analyses carried out by other researcher.

Means, standard deviations, Pearson r correlations, and reliabilities. For each of the constructs tested in the model, the means and standard deviations are provided. These means and standard deviations offer the reader aggregate information about the nature of the data collected in this study. They also aid future researchers in replicating some or all of the study and provide data to meta-analysts interested in conducting meta-studies on these variables.

Intercorrelations among the variables are provided to offer insight into how each construct co-varies with each other variable. Like the pilot study, the intercorelations are bivariate, Pearson r correlations. As presented in the model, two of the constructs (attitudes and behavior intention) are expected to be predicted by more than one antecedent construct. The intercorrelation matrix reveals the strength and direction of

each relationship absent multiple antecedent variables. This further aids in providing context for the data and in providing data for future researchers and meta-analysts.

As previously stated, reliability refers to the degree of internal reliability for a construct. Since scale scores were created for each variable under study, reliability indicates how well items expected to measure a construct relate to one another. As in the pilot study, Cronbach's alphas of between 0.7071 and 0.85 provide evidence that the internal reliability of items for an established construct is adequate for research in the social sciences. However, it has been noted that lower reliability coefficients are adequate, especially in exploratory research situations (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1991). For this study, it is considered acceptable if the job satisfaction construct returned a reliability coefficient of 0.7071 or higher and if the custom constructs returned reliability coefficients of 0.50 or higher. The pilot study showed whether items failed to measure their respective constructs; it was at that time that the decision to make adjustments to or to eliminate items from the study was made.

Multiple regression. For measurement of the substantive relationships implied by the model tested in this study, multiple regression was chosen as the primary statistical method. Multiple regression is particularly suited to this study for several reasons. First, it satisfies the need to evaluate both the strength and direction of the relationships between and among constructs (Aiken & West, 1991). Multiple regression offers four major statistics with which to judge relationships. A standardized beta represents the strength of the relationship between two variables. Expressed as a coefficient ranging from zero (no relationship) to one (perfect relationship), standardized beta allows a

researcher to examine the strength of a relationship without regard to the scale used to measure the underlying observed variables. This makes it easy to know which relationships are strongest and which variables need more examination in the current or future research.

Second, multiple regression assigns a positive or negative sign to the standardized beta to indicate the direction of the relationship. This offers the researcher insight into whether relationships among constructs operated in the expected direction. A positive sign indicates that as the one variable increases so does the other in some proportion indicated by the standardized beta. A negative sign indicates that as one variable increases the other decreases in some proportion indicated by the standardized beta.

Third, a standardized beta does not alone indicate whether the relationships between and among constructs are statistically significant. Statistical significance is a combination of both effect size and the size of the study (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2007). To be significant, a standardized beta must be large enough in relation to the degrees of freedom in the study. Degrees of freedom, in turn, are dependent on the number of subjects who took part in the study. To determine statistical significance, multiple regression uses an F-statistic, a robust statistical tool for ruling out random error as a source of significant findings. The F-statistic itself is a ratio with effect size plus error in the numerator and estimation of population error in the denominator. The degree that the numerator is larger than the denominator determines statistical significance. The statistic itself ranges from zero to positive infinity. The larger the F-statistic, the more

likely a relationship is significant beyond what can be accounted for by random error (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1991).

Fourth, a p-value indicates the probability level associated with a test of significance. The p-value is a measure of alpha, the probability that random sampling of the same population would result in a difference smaller than that observed in the current study (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In any inferential study, there is danger of making a Type 1 error. A Type 1 error is a term used to describe a situation when a non-random effect was observed when it should not have been observed and should instead be attributed to coincidence or random error (Keith, 2005).

In the social sciences, a p-value of 0.05 is often used as a cut-off point to determine significant from non-significant inferences. A p-value of 0.05 means that there is a 5% chance that random sampling from the same population would result in a difference smaller than that presently observed in data. In studies where a relationship was found significant in the past, p-values much smaller than 0.05 (e.g. 0.01 and 0.001) are sometimes used and in exploratory studies where relationships are being developed and tested inductively, p-values larger than 0.05 (e.g. 0.1 and 0.2) are sometimes used (Cohen et al., 2003). This study is correlational; it cannot be classified as experimental or quasi-experimental because subjects were not randomly assigned and no variables were manipulated. For this study, a p-value of 0.05 serves as the cut-off point between what is accepted as significant and what is dismissed as not significant. This cut-off point provides a balance for a correlational study between testing relationship that are known (confirmatory study) and unknown (exploratory).

Finally, multiple regression allows calculation of multiple correlations, which represent the linear relationships among more than two variables. Multiple correlations are measured using a coefficient of multiple determination and is represented by the squared multiple correlation, also known as r-squared. R-squared can take a value of between zero and one; coefficients closer to one represent stronger relationships and coefficients closer to zero represent weaker relationships. R-squared is often used as goodness-of-fit measure because it represents the proportion of variation in a variable that is explained by antecedent variables (Freedman, Pisani, & Purves, 2007). For example, an r-squared of 0.3 means that 30% of the independent construct's or constructs' variability explains the dependent construct's variability. Two of the constructs in the model, attitude and behavioral intention, have multiple predictor (independent) variables. The squared multiple correlation value shows how much the independent variables predict these constructs.

Summary of Methods

The methods adopted for this dissertation provided a comprehensive procedure for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data. The pilot study demonstrated that the measures created and used for this study accurately measured the intended constructs. Using Cronbach's alphas as measures of internal consistency, convergent validity was demonstrated. Alpha coefficients equal to or greater than 0.7071 provide evidence for convergent validity for established measures while a coefficient of 0.50 or higher provides evidence for custom measures. Coefficients lower than these target values provide justification for elimination of items not measuring the underlying

constructs. For the remaining items, a new alpha coefficient can be calculated to demonstrate internal consistency.

The study included procedures for testing, interpreting, and presenting the relationships implied by the model that was developed in the previous chapter. Multiple regression was chosen to drive the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from the data; it offered a way to test the strength and direction of the relationships and a way to assess the influence of multiple antecedents on a dependent variable.

The next chapter chronicles the execution of both the pilot and main studies. Using the methods described in this chapter, data were collected and tested for the relationships in the model. Relevant statistics are reported and interpreted for the reader.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This dissertation is comprised of two main parts: 1) a pilot study to verify the internal consistency of the both the established measure and the custom measures used in this study and 2) the study, which includes testing of a model that directly relates to five research questions discussed and developed in previous chapters. The pilot study consisted of having subjects fill out surveys to collect data for subsequent reliability coefficient calculations. The study consisted of additional subjects who followed the same procedures as those who participated in the pilot study.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the statistical findings associated with the relationships among constructs suggested by the model in answering the following research questions:

1. How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction?
2. How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession?
3. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession?
4. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

5. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

First, results of the pilot study are presented including descriptive data related to demographic information collected during the pilot study. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and Pearson r correlations are given. Reliability coefficients that suggest internal reliability for all constructs examined in the study are presented for the pilot study. These coefficients suggest whether items from the survey should be eliminated due to low internal consistency. Interpretations of the pilot study are presented and discussed.

Second, study results are presented starting with demographic information for the entire study. Descriptive statistics regarding the constructs under study include means, standard deviations, and Pearson r correlations among the constructs. Reliability coefficients are presented and compared with those calculated in the pilot study. Discrepancies and congruencies are pointed out and discussed. Research questions are then explored by presenting multiple correlational results of the relationships implied by the model tested in this dissertation. Significant and non-significant results are pointed out including interpretations of the correlations and their directions. Findings regarding squared multiple correlations are presented, discussed, and interpreted. Finally, results of the study are summarized to provide a basis for the interpretations, recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for future studies in Chapter V.

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to verify that the measures used in this study - especially the custom measures created specifically for this study - exhibit satisfactory levels of reliability. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Ranging from 0 to 1, a coefficient greater than 0.7071 was considered satisfactory for job satisfaction and coefficients greater than 0.50 were considered satisfactory for the custom measures created for this dissertation. In addition to reliability coefficients, demographic data for the pilot study participants are presented in Table 4.1. These data include averages and standard deviations calculations for the age and special education teaching experience variables and frequencies and percentage count for the gender, ethnicity, and education level variables. For comparison purposes, a table was constructed to present the means, standard deviations, Pearson r correlations among the constructs, and the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients. Table 4.2 shows these results.

Demographic Data (Pilot Study)

As planned, thirty participants took part in the pilot study under the procedures discussed in Chapter III. Of these participants, five (16.67%) were male and 25 (83.33%) were female. The average age was 37.14 years (SD=11.5 years) and the average number of years of experience as a special education teacher was 10.23 years (SD=9.58 years). Ten participants (33.33%) were white, 12 were African American (40%), five were Hispanic (16.67%), one was a Pacific Islander (3.33%), and two were bi-racial (6.67%). Finally, 15 participants (50%) held a Bachelor's degree and the remaining 15 (50%) held a Master's degree. A summary of these results are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1*Demographic Data for Pilot Study*

		Pilot Study
Gender (Freq., Percent)	Male	5 (16.67%)
	Female	25 (83.33%)
	Total	30 (100%)
Age (Mean, SD)		37.14 (11.55)
Ethnicity (Freq., Percent)	White	10 (33.33%)
	African Am.	12 (40.00%)
	Hispanic	5 (16.67%)
	Pacific Is.	1 (3.33%)
	Bi-racial	2 (6.67%)
SPED Teaching Exp. (Mean, SD)		10.23 (9.58)
Education Level (Freq., Percent)	Bachelor's	15 (50%)
	Master's	15 (50%)

Results of the Pilot Study

As Table 4.2 shows, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the job satisfaction construct was 0.72. The reliability coefficients for the custom measures were 0.90 for professional challenges, 0.74 for attitudes, 0.66 for subjective norms, 0.50 for perceived behavioral control, and 0.71 for behavior intention.

Table 4.2

Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson r Correlations, and Cronbach's Alphas[†] for Pilot Study

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Prof. Chal.	3.10	1.01	(0.90)					
2. Job Sat.	5.43	1.01	-0.76**	(0.72)				
3. Attitudes	41.57	19.18	0.18	-0.50**	(0.74)			
4. Subj. Norms	37.67	15.17	0.16	0.30	0.12	(0.66)		
5. Perc. Beh. Ctrl.	64.70	26.25	-0.07	0.06	-0.10	-0.17	(0.50)	
6. Behavior Int.	2.32	0.88	0.14	-0.54**	0.68**	0.54**	0.10	(0.71)

† Reliability coefficients shown along the diagonal

** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation of Pilot Study Results

The reliability coefficient for the job satisfaction construct exceeded the minimum 0.7071 required to suggest internal consistency. Therefore, no action was necessary. For three of the custom measures (professional challenges, attitudes, and behavior intention), the reliability coefficients exceeded the minimum 0.50 to suggest internal reliability and even exceeded the reliability necessary to suggest internal consistency for an established measure. Therefore, no action was taken. The reliability coefficient for the subjective norms constructs was 0.66, less than that necessary to suggest adequate internal consistency for an established measure but greater than that needed for a custom measure. Therefore, no action was taken. The reliability coefficient

for the perceived behavioral control construct sits exactly at the minimum of 0.50 for internal consistency. Although it met the requirement discussed in Chapter III, it provided some worry as to what results would be obtained in the study. Since it met the minimum requirements, no action was taken but it was noted and looked at carefully when the study data were analyzed.

Study Results

To answer the research questions posed in this dissertation, a model (Figure 2.1) was developed to test the antecedents that led to intention perceptions of urban elementary special education teachers to leave the profession. What follows is a comprehensive examination of the subjects, data, and model that makes up the study. First, demographic information is presented that indicates the gender breakdown, average age, ethnicities, years of special education experience, and education levels of the subjects. Next, each research question and its corresponding statistical tests are presented and discussed. Finally, an interpretation of the results is presented to aid in the interpretations and recommendations appearing in the subsequent chapter of this dissertation.

Demographic Data

Forty-nine additional subjects took part in the study. When combined with the data from the pilot study, the total number of participants in the study was 79. Of these seventy-nine participants, eleven (13%) were male and sixty-eight (86.1%) were female. The average age was 38.08 years (SD=11.4 years) and the average number of years of experience as a special education was 11.08 years (SD=9.11). Twenty-four participants

were white (30.38%), thirty-nine were African American (49.37%), ten were Hispanic (12.66%), one was Asian American (1.27%), one was a Pacific Islander (1.27%), one was Native American (1.27%), one was Arab American (1.27%), and two were bi-racial (2.53%). Finally, fifty-two (65.82%) held a Bachelor's degree and the remaining twenty-seven held a Master's degree. These figures are summarized in Table 4.3.

The demographic breakdown of the subjects in the study did not differ significantly from those participants who took part in the pilot study. Therefore, no analyses were necessary to account for major discrepancies in the subject makeup of the two studies.

Descriptive Results of the Study

The table on page 68 shows the means, standard deviations, Pearson r correlations, and Cronbach alpha coefficients for the constructs that were part of the study. The reliability coefficient for the established measure, job satisfaction, was 0.74. This value is in excess of both the 0.7071 necessary to suggest internal consistency and value (0.72) obtained during the pilot study. The reliability coefficients for the remaining measures were all in excess of the alpha necessary (0.50) to suggest internal consistency for a custom construct.

The professional challenges construct had an alpha coefficient of 0.86, slightly less than that observed in the pilot study (0.90). The attitudes construct had a reliability coefficient of 0.79, greater than the 0.74 from the pilot study. An alpha coefficient of 0.57 was observed for the subjective norms construct, a value less than the 0.66 observed in the pilot data. Perceived behavioral control had an alpha of 0.53, higher than the 0.50

coefficient in the pilot study. As noted in the section above, this value just at the cut-off in the pilot study was cause for concern. However, a similar - if not slightly higher - coefficient suggests internal consistency. Finally, an alpha of 0.76 was observed for behavior intention, a value in excess of the 0.71 in the pilot study. Overall, the measures used in the study exceeded the values necessary to suggest adequate reliability for established (0.7071) and custom (0.50) measures. No further analyses were conducted in relation to internal consistency and no items were eliminated from the study due to poor reliability loadings on their respective constructs. See Table 4.4 for a summary of these values.

Research Questions

Addressing the research questions in this dissertation revolves around testing a series of multiple regression correlations that are part of the overall model examined in this dissertation. Some research questions have multiple correlations associated with them and require deeper interpretations to obtain valuable information from the correlations. A figure identical to Figure 2.1 was created to summarize the correlational and squared multiple correlations (r-squared) results calculated to test the relationships. This summary is presented in Figure 4.1.

A table that summarizes the results of the study is also presented. It contains an identification of the research questions examined in this study, the research questions' associated correlations, standardized beta weights for the correlations, F-statistics that suggest the degree of significance for the standardized beta weights, and p-values that suggest whether the null hypothesis of no significance should be rejected.

Table 4.3*Demographic Data for the Study*

		The Study
Gender (Freq., Percent)	Male	11 (13.9%)
	Female	68 (86.1%)
	Total	79 (100%)
Age (Mean, SD)		38.08 (11.40)
Ethnicity (Freq., Percent)	White	24 (30.38%)
	African Am.	39 (49.37%)
	Hispanic	10 (12.66%)
	Asian Am.	1 (1.27%)
	Pacific Is.	1 (1.27%)
	Native Am.	1 (1.27%)
	Arab Am.	1 (1.27%)
	Bi-racial	2 (2.53%)
SPED Teaching Exp. (Mean, SD)		11.08 (9.11)
Education Level (Freq., Percent)	Bachelor's	52 (65.82%)
	Master's	27 (34.18%)

How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction? A single correlational analysis was conducted between two constructs to answer whether professional challenges relate to the job

satisfaction. Linear regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between these two constructs. With a standardized beta of -0.71 ($F_{(1, 77)}=9.02, p<0.01$), results suggest that there is a significant relationship between professional challenges experienced by special education teachers and their perceptions of job satisfaction. The negative standardized beta weight further suggests that higher levels of professional challenges are associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. Similarly, lower levels of professional challenges are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction.

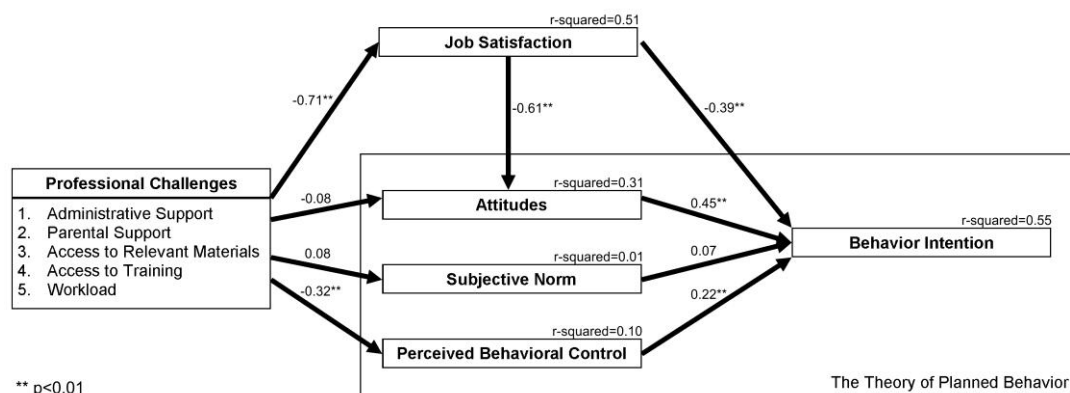


Figure 4.1. Model Standardized Betas and Squared Multiple Correlations.

How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession? Three correlational analyses were conducted among four constructs to answer whether professional challenges relate to attitudes about leaving the profession, subjective norms associated with leaving the profession, and perceived behavioral control over leaving the profession. First, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between professional

challenges and attitudes while controlling for job satisfaction. With a standardized beta of -0.08 ($F_{1, 77}=0.57$, $p=0.57$), results suggest no significant relationship between professional challenges and attitudes.

Table 4.4

Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson r Correlations, and Cronbach's Alphas[†]

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Prof. Chal.	3.38	0.89	(0.86)					
2. Job Sat.	5.18	1.19	-0.72**	(0.74)				
3. Attitudes	42.41	15.89	0.36**	-0.56**	(0.79)			
4. Subj. Norms	34.15	12.35	0.08	-0.22	0.14	(0.57)		
5. Perc. Beh. Ctrl.	58.32	27.89	-0.32**	0.40**	-0.26**	-0.10	(0.53)	
6. Behavior Int.	2.08	0.93	0.32	-0.59**	0.64**	0.20	-0.06	(0.76)

† Reliability coefficients shown along the diagonal

** $p<0.01$

Second, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between professional challenges and subjective norms. With a standardized beta of 0.08 ($F_{1, 77}=0.74$, $p=0.46$), results suggest no significant relationship between professional challenges and subjective norms.

Third, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between professional challenges and perceived behavioral control. With a standardized beta of -0.32 ($F_{1, 77}=3.00$, $p<0.01$), results suggests there is a significant relationship between professional challenges and perceived behavioral control. The

negative standardized beta weight further suggests that higher levels of professional challenges are associated with lower levels of perceived behavioral control. Similarly, lower levels of professional challenges are associated with higher levels of perceived behavioral control.

How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession? A single correlational analysis was conducted between two constructs to answer whether job satisfaction relates to attitudes about leaving the profession. Linear regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between these two constructs while controlling for professional challenges. With a standardized beta of -0.61 ($F_{1, 77}=4.56, p<0.01$), results suggest that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and attitudes about leaving the profession. The negative standardized beta weight further suggests that higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with lower levels of attitudes. Similarly, lower levels of job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of attitudes.

How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession? A single correlational analysis was conducted between two constructs to answer whether job satisfaction relates to a special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. Linear regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between these two constructs while controlling for attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. With a standardized beta of -0.39 ($F_{1, 77}=4.23, p<0.01$), results suggest that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and behavior

intention. The negative standardized beta weight further suggests that higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with lower levels of behavior intention. Similarly, lower levels of job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of behavior intention.

How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession? Three correlational analyses were conducted among four constructs to answer whether attitudes about leaving the profession, subjective norms associated with leaving the profession, and perceived behavioral control over leaving the profession relate to special education teacher's intention to leave the profession. First, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between attitudes and behavior intention while controlling for subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. With a standardized beta of 0.45 ($F_{1, 77}=4.94$, $p<0.01$), results suggest there is a significant relationship between attitudes and behavior intention. The positive standardized beta suggests that higher levels of attitudes about leaving the profession are associated with higher levels of intention to leave the profession. Similarly, lower levels of attitudes about leaving the profession are associated with lower levels of intention to leave the profession

Second, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between subjective norms and behavior intention while controlling for attitudes and perceived behavioral control. With a standardized beta of 0.07 ($F_{1, 77}=0.90$, $p=0.37$), results suggest no significant relationship between subjective norms and behavior intention.

Third, multiple regression was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavior intention while controlling for attitudes and subjective norms. With a standardized beta of 0.22 ($F_{1,77}=2.86, p<0.01$), results suggests there is a significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavior intention. The positive standardized beta suggests that higher levels of perceived behavioral control are associated with higher levels of intention to leave the profession. Similarly, lower levels of perceived behavioral control about leaving the profession are associated with lower levels of intention to leave the profession.

Squared Multiple Correlations

As discussed in the previous chapter, squared multiple correlation is a measure of the amount of variability in an dependent variable that is explained by an independent variable (in the case of one predictor variable) or variables (in the case of two or more predictor variables). Expressed as a coefficient between 0 (no predictability) to 1 (perfect predictability), the squared multiple correlation (or r-squared) indicates the percentage of the independent construct's variability that predicts the dependent construct. The squared multiple correlations are shown in Table 4.5.

Job satisfaction had just one independent variable, professional challenges. The r-squared associated with this relationship was 0.51, suggesting that 51% of the professional challenges construct predicts job satisfaction. Attitudes had two predictor variables, professional challenges and job satisfaction. The r-squared associated with these relationships was 0.31, suggesting that 31% of the professional challenges and job

satisfaction constructs predict attitudes. However, since the relationship between professional challenges and attitudes was found not significant, it can be assumed that the majority of this percentage was due to the job satisfaction construct.

Table 4.5

Squared Multiple Correlations for the Study

	R^2
Job Satisfaction	0.51
Attitudes	0.31
Subjective Norms	0.01
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.10
Behavior Intention	0.55

Subjective norms had just one independent variable, professional challenges. The r-squared associated with this relationship was 0.01, suggesting that 1% of the professional challenges construct predicts subjective norms. This low value is not surprising given that the relationship between the constructs was not significant. Conversely, perceived behavioral control had the same independent variable, professional challenges. The r-squared associated with this relationship was 0.10, suggesting that 10% of the professional challenges construct predicts perceived behavioral control. Although not as strong a predictor as other variables in the model, this relationship was significant.

Behavior intention - arguably the more important construct in the study - had four independent variables including job satisfaction, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The r-squared associated with these relationships was 0.55, suggesting that 55% of job satisfaction, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control constructs predict behavior intention. Since the relationship between subjective norms and behavior intention was found not significant, it can be assumed that the majority of this percentage was due to the job satisfaction, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control constructs.

Summary of Study Results

Of the nine correlations calculated in this study, six (66.67%) returned significant results. The remaining three (33.33%) did not pass the criterion of a p-value less than 0.05 to be considered significant. For those three, it was not possible to reject the null hypothesis that significant relationships did not exist between the constructs. In fact, those relationships found to be not significant were far from the cut-off criterion. However, at least one significant result was found per research question. Generally, it is accurate to suggest that the model tested in this study was partially valid in its ability to predict and reveal the antecedents of an urban elementary special education teacher's intention to leave the special education profession.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore antecedents to urban elementary special education teachers' intention to leave the profession. Drawing from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991) and other relevant education and managerial

literature, a model was developed to test five research questions. In addition, a clear research agenda was developed according to the recommendations made by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2009) and the requirements of the Human Subjects' Protection Program at Texas A&M University to accurately collect and analyze data.

The purpose of the pilot study was to establish that a measure already established in the literature and five custom measures created for this dissertation exhibited satisfactory levels of internal consistency. During the pilot stage of the study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the six constructs met or exceeded the criteria to suggest internal reliability. The reliability for the perceived behavioral control construct was calculated to be just at the criterion cut-off, causing some concern that its reliability may not be adequate when the study data were analyzed.

The purpose of the study was to explore five research questions relating to the antecedents of the behavior intention of urban elementary special education teachers' to leave the special education profession. To answer these research questions, a model consisting of six constructs and nine relationships among them was developed from relevant literature. Like in the pilot study, internal consistency measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficients was established when all constructs met or exceeded the cut-off points for reliability. The construct that caused some concern on the pilot study was higher in the study, suggesting a satisfactory level of reliability.

Results of the study suggest that professional challenges predict the job satisfaction of urban elementary special education teachers. While professional

challenges were not observed to be antecedents of attitudes and subjective norms associated with leaving the profession, professional challenges did predict perceived behavioral control of leaving the profession. Job satisfaction was a significant predictor of both attitudes about leaving the profession and a teacher's behavior intention to leave the profession. Finally, while attitudes and perceived behavioral control were antecedents to the behavior intention of leaving the profession, subjective norms were not.

The next chapter of this dissertation contains four main parts. First, an in-depth interpretation of the significance of the results found in this study is provided. Second, recommendations to administrators, teachers, and researchers are offered and explored. Third, the limitations of this dissertation are identified and explored so subsequent researchers can expand more effectively on the results found in this study. Finally, future research directions are discussed and recommended.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore five research questions concerning antecedents to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions of leaving the special education profession. Adopting a quantitative method, a model was developed from relevant literature and tested empirically using a sample of teachers who met strict criteria for qualification to participate in the study. The research questions explored in this dissertation were:

1. How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction?
2. How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession?
3. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession?
4. How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?
5. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

The Value of This Research

The value of this research stems from several contributions it makes to the growing body of educational literature. First, rarely has existing research focused on the antecedents to special education teachers' intention to leave the profession. In fact, most research deals only with raw retention, attrition, and enrollment statistics; these studies observe and explain what has already happened and offer little in terms of predicting why a teacher contemplates leaving the profession.

This study benefits from a mixture of extant and new relationships. In doing so, the research is grounded in established theory and yet applies to relationships that have not prominently appeared in the literature. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is a model and measurement tool used in psychology, management, education, and other areas to describe and predict behavior intention. Conversely, professional challenges are recognized in the literature but given little more than anecdotal attention when it comes to predicting important outcomes such as retention and turnover. The sub-constructs that make up the professional challenges were developed to capture a broad range of related challenges faced by urban special education teachers.

This study also demonstrates that it is possible to predict teachers' intention to leave the profession from antecedent variables. The most important findings in this study suggest that professional challenges, job satisfaction, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control are strong indicators of behavior intention to leave the profession. Finally, this dissertation provides a basis for future research and sparks a new direction when studying retention, turnover, and related topics. In particular, this study demonstrates

that predicting intention to leave the profession by urban elementary special education teachers is worth pursuing; expanding the research to include broader samples of subjects, exploring different relationships among constructs, and introducing new constructs to the model is especially warranted and encouraged.

Interpretation of Results

The purpose of this study was to do more than just collect, analyze, and report on the statistical significance of groups of numbers; its goal was to push the literature forward by looking for significant results and reporting on the meaning behind the findings. In some cases, non-significant results are as telling as significant ones. What follows is an in-depth interpretation of the significant and non-significant results found in this study. Then, recommendations are offered to administrators, teachers, and researchers when it comes to urban elementary special education teachers who are thinking about leaving the special education profession.

Research Questions 1, 2

How do professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to job satisfaction?

How do the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control about leaving the special education profession?

The professional challenges construct in this dissertation demonstrated disparate results in its ability to predict four other constructs. Its contribution to job satisfaction was perhaps one of the most significant findings in the study (Pisciotta, 1999). Capturing

51% of the variability, professional challenges impact job satisfaction in a way that is undeniably important. As the results of this study suggest, higher levels of professional challenges translate into drastically lower job satisfaction. From an administrator's point of view, removing and reducing these professional challenges is one of the first steps when it comes to increasing satisfaction on the job and influencing retention of much-needed educators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Surprisingly, professional challenges do not influence directly attitudes subjects held about leaving the professional. However, a relationship found between job satisfaction and attitudes sheds some light on how professional challenges impacts attitudes subjects held about leaving the special education profession. More on this topic is discussed in the section related to job satisfaction.

Professional challenges had no impact on predicting subjective norms. However, the subjective norms construct was broadly defined in this study and was perhaps too broadly defined. More evidence to this possibility was found in the non-significant relationship subjective norms and behavior intention. In this study, subjective norms were conceptualized to arise from three distinct sources: the teacher's administrators, co-workers, and family. Subjective norms represent the pressures and influences of others on the perceptions a focal individual feels about behaving in some way. The perceptions to leave the special education profession theorized to manifest from those three sources may actually individually influence the perception. The lower internal consistency observed for the subjective norms construct provides evidence that the measure - if not

conceptualization of the construct - needs improvement before being used in subsequent research.

Professional challenges moderately influenced the perceived behavioral control subjects reported in being able to leave the profession. Capturing 10% of the variability, higher perceptions of these types of challenges were associated with lower levels of behavioral control. This suggests that other constructs can help understand what influences a teacher's belief that finding another job is difficult or easy. One explanation may be found in the reason why special education teachers enter the profession in the first place (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Special education teachers often enter the profession to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach. Perceiving higher levels of professional challenges may evoke a sense of duty, a moral obligation to stay with rather than leave the students behind. Perhaps these emotions evolve into a need to avoid abandoning the students who need qualified teachers the most. It is a "question of whether prediction[s] of wrongdoing are relevant to...moral obligations" (Louise, 2009, p. 327). Perhaps these feelings of moral obligation are brought on by perceptions of high professional challenges, especially those from lack of parental support as conceptualized in this study. These moral obligations, in turn, are related to a teacher's belief that he/she has the ability to leave the profession (behavioral control) because a sense of moral obligation prevents it (Goldman, 1978; Jackson, 1985). Whatever the case, there is some room for future research that adds to better prediction of a perceived ability to leave the profession.

Research Questions 3, 4

How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' attitudes about leaving the special education profession?

How does job satisfaction relate to urban elementary special education teachers' behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

Job satisfaction impacted highly attitudes subjects held about leaving the special education profession. Given the non-significant relationship between professional challenges and attitudes discussed above, this suggests that job satisfaction is a mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986) between job professional challenges and attitudes. Essentially, this detour through job satisfaction is the way through which professional challenges impact attitudes.

This finding is an important one in light of the fact that multiple regression was used to control for the influences of the antecedent variables on the attitudes construct. Table 4.4 shows that the bivariate (Pearson r) correlation between professional challenges and attitudes was significant at 0.36 ($p < 0.01$). However, the job satisfaction construct took so much variability away from the model in explaining attitudes, that there was not enough left over to significantly identify professional challenges as an antecedent to attitudes. Absent job satisfaction and on its own, professional challenges is a significant predictor of attitudes (Hutchins et al., 2010).

This does not mean that all professional challenges are diminished when job satisfaction is considered in a model predicting attitudes about leaving the special education profession. The five sub-constructs used to estimate professional challenges

perceived by subjects were only a few of many that could have been considered. More research into the professional challenges faced by urban elementary special education teachers may reveal some challenges that better predict attitudes about leaving the profession.

Research Question 5

How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of leaving the special education profession relate to behavior intentions to leave the special education profession?

The theory of planned behavior suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control concerning a focal behavior predict simultaneously the intention of individuals to behave in some way. As the model in Figure 2.1 illustrates, the theory was used as both an outcome of professional challenges and job satisfaction and as conceptualized in its unmodified state. Results suggest that both attitudes and perceived behavioral control predict behavior intention just as the original, general model does. However, subjective norms were not found to correlate with behavior intention. Rather than suggest that the original model needs adjustment, it is likely that the subjective norms construct was either not conceptualized correctly or conceptualized too broadly.

Three sources of subjective norms (administrators, co-workers, and family) were considered when estimating the influence and pressures experienced by subjects to leave the special education profession. As mentioned above, low reliability scores for this construct and failure to correlate with another construct earlier in the model suggest that

subjective norms may have been specified incorrectly. More research is needed to identify exactly which sources of external pressures influence intention to leave the profession. For example, perhaps teachers are influenced differently by subjective norms from multiple sources. New sources should be explored such as those from close friends to uncover exactly how the pressures and perceptions of others affect behavior intentions of leaving the profession (Hunt & Gross, 2009; Ryu & Han, 2010). In addition, the link between job satisfaction and subjective norms warrants further investigation. As Table 4.4 shows, the bivariate (Pearson r) correlation between these constructs was high (-0.22) but statistically non-significant. Further research may demonstrate that job satisfaction is connected to behavior intention when subjective norms act as a mediator.

Recommendations

This research was conducted and reported in the hopes of enacting positive changes. As the literature shows, it is difficult to retain special educators, particularly in urban districts. Knowing what causes such specialists to consider leaving the profession might help interested parties in meeting the needs of these teachers and in keeping them in the field. The following discussion is of concern to three different categories of stakeholders.

Administrators include principals, vice principals, superintendents, and other individuals and positions hierarchically above teachers. The administrator category can even extend to positions in teachers' unions and leaders of parent-teacher associations who have a vested interest in the retention and acquisition of quality special education educators. The teacher category includes anyone actively engaged in special education

teaching including classroom aides and others experiencing professional challenges as a special education educator. Finally, the researcher category includes anyone actively engaged in studying the antecedents of special education teachers contemplating leaving the profession.

Administrators

This study's most significant findings for administrators lie in the connections found among professional challenges, job satisfaction, and attitudes about leaving the profession. The mediation of professional challenges and attitudes by job satisfaction suggests that special education teachers that are unhappy with their working conditions are more likely to begin thoughts of leaving the profession. In fact, there is strong evidence to suggest that the more professional challenges a teacher faces, the greater the cognitions of leaving the profession (Gerston et al., 2001; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Santoli et al., 2008).

These findings suggest that administrators need to do their best to reduce or eliminate not only the professional challenges themselves but the cumulative effects they have on job satisfaction (Nir, 2007; Otto & Arnold, 2005). For example, each teacher faces and perceives professional challenges differently. One approach administrators could take is to reduce workloads for all special education teachers by hiring a paperwork specialist who can wade through and fill out the many forms often required from special education educators. This would be a group level approach to lowering professional challenges. However, administrators can also take an individualized approach by ensuring that any one teacher is not overly burdened (Gerston et al., 2001).

Many of the challenges hidden to administrators but part of a teacher's daily challenge such as lack of parental support may influence greatly a teacher's intentions to leave the job. Raw counts such as number of special education children in a classroom and organization-wide measures do not reveal or combat the individual challenges faced by teachers.

The professional challenges as conceptualized in this study were an amalgam of elements considered to influence attitudes and job satisfaction. However, professional challenges are not simply a group concept to be addressed without the individual differences of the teacher taken into account. Each teacher has his or her own method of dealing with challenges; each has his or her own threshold levels for dealing with stress. Administrators trying to combat professional challenges at the group or organizational levels through policy, rules, and heuristics miss an opportunity to explore genuine sources of professional challenges and the ability to better address them so as to retain much-needed educators (Weibke & Bardin, 2009).

There is also a lesson to be learned here concerning culturally responsive administration. Student demographics have changed significantly in recent decades (Orfield & Lee, 2007); for the first time in U.S. history, African American students are outnumbered by Hispanic students. In addition, the number of White students in public schools is shrinking. As with mainstream classrooms, special education classrooms must address the cultural backgrounds of the students. Special education teachers must now address culture in addition to the challenges introduced by teaching special needs children. This is especially true since culturally responsive teachers are more in tune

with the advantages of multicultural curricula; they revise education material more often to make adjustments to overall teaching paradigms (Gay, 2002).

Teachers

This study's most significant findings for teachers lie in the connections found among professional challenges, perceived behavioral control, and behavior intentions to leave the profession. The links among these constructs suggest that levels of professional challenges influence a teacher's belief that leaving the profession is something that can be done. In turn, the belief that the behavior can be done influences the teacher's intention to actually leave the profession.

As mentioned earlier, the professional challenges identified in this research may be a catalyst that reminds special education teachers of the moral obligations they perceive when it comes to providing education to special needs children. These moral obligations may create barriers that prevent a special education teacher from perceiving the ability to leave the profession. Such self-imposed barriers may prevent a teacher from pursuing a work life better suited to his or her needs as an educator (Hutchins et al., 2010; Nance & Calabrese, 2009). Certainly, the higher stress and increased legal and regulatory requirements that come with teaching special needs children are not for every educator. Teachers better able to deal with these challenges end up providing a better overall learning experience for their students.

A perceived moral obligation keeping a teacher in a special education classroom may result in a lower educational experience for his/her students. Special education teachers should keep in mind the obligation to themselves to be happy with their work

and seek a position that allows them to maximize benefits to students regardless of who those students are. As argued in this study, professional challenges come from sources outside the control of the special education teacher. When these challenges become too much to bear, it may be best to leave the profession before the educational experience of the students drops to substandard or dangerous levels (Fore et al., 2002; Woltmann & Camron, 2009).

Researchers

This study's most significant findings for researchers lie in the connections found among the constructs associated with the theory of planned behavior. Although the theory's validity is established well in extant literature, this study demonstrates that the theory can be applied successfully to behaviors associated with leaving a profession (Shwu-Ru, 2009). The lack of support for the subjective norms construct does provide some concern for how norms should be conceptualized in this context (Harris et al., 2007).

The r-squared associated with the behavior intentions construct in this study suggests that 55% of its variability is explained by job satisfaction and the remaining three constructs of the theory. Studies using the theory of planned behavior do not often add extraneous variables as done in this dissertation (Henningesen, Valde, Russell, & Russell, 2011; Murnaghan, Blanchard, Rodgers, Rosa, MacQuarrie, Maclelland, & Gray, 2009; Obrusnikova, Dillon, & Block, 2011). However, even when a significant amount of the variability of behavior intention was explained by job satisfaction, enough variability remained to be explained by attitudes and perceived behavioral control.

Limitations with the subjective norms construct were discussed already. Researchers looking to further the model developed in this dissertation should seek to explore other variables that collectively add more predictive power to the behavior intention construct.

Study Limitations

All studies are subject to limitations that the researcher either knew about before conducting the study (a priori) or discovered a posteriori. This dissertation is no different. First, this study was limited to one sample, in one country, in one location, and in one context. Care must be taken when interpreting this study's findings and using induction to predict the general from the specific. Only more research that uses other samples, in other locations, and in other contexts can reveal the true value of this study. Second, data in this study were collected from a single source. Research that includes multiple sources and externally verifiable data would enhance the findings of this dissertation (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Third, the non-significant findings associated with the subjective norms construct may have been due to over-generalization of the sources of influence and motivation to consider leaving the profession. A more finely conceptualized subjective norms construct may yield significant results in line with the extant theories that were a part of this study. Fourth, intention to behave in some way was the focus of this dissertation, not actual behavior. Although research suggests that intention to behave and actual behavior are strongly linked and that the former may act as a substitute in the absence of the latter, intention to behave is not truly the same as observed behavior. Finally, in developing a construct that captured the on-the-job influencers of intention to leave the profession, a professional challenges construct was

defined. However, this study did not address the personal challenges such as disabilities, level of education, personality traits, teaching experience, short-term stressors, family life, job opportunities, personal economic factors, and other pertinent, personal contributors to intentions to leave the profession. Due to the statistics used in this study, such influences were treated as sources of random error rather than substantive contributors to dependent variables (Myers & Well, 1995). The model and research questions explored in this dissertation would benefit from inclusion of such variables.

Future Research Directions

Most of the recommendations for future research directions discussed here are derived from the limitations of this study. Although this dissertation concentrated on three distinct teacher attributes (urban, elementary school, special education), it is possible to extend the model tested in this study to other teacher categories. Researchers could also test the predictive ability of the model using multiple categories in the same study. Such studies would suggest whether, for example, professional challenges are equally predictive of intention to leave the profession in high school versus middle school teachers, urban versus suburban or rural teachers, and special education versus mainstream teachers. Of particular interest are differences experienced by teachers at different levels in urban settings. For example, are the experiences of urban middle school special education teachers different from those of high school teachers? Identifying the professional challenges or combinations of challenges that influence these groups' intentions to leave the profession would contribute to a global picture of the variables used in this study. Research could explore not only the strength of the

relationships among constructs but also which constructs best predict intention to leave the profession under different educational paradigms and curricula.

Second, future research should include collection of data from multiple sources. Extant literature clearly demonstrates the biases introduced when data is collected from a single source. Single source bias is derived from a focal individual's inability to distinguish multiple attributes of the same object or person (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The result is correlations among constructs that are due to the method of data collection rather than a substantive relationship. Future research should consider multiple sources of data that capture constructs using a more reliable method. Adopting multiple research methodologies would expose even more about the variables used in this study. One particular method that may reveal more about this topic is interviews with teachers who move from special education to general education. Using this method, differences between both groups of teachers can be studied and revealed to better understand the processes and outcomes teachers experience when leaving the special education profession.

Third, the subjective norms variable was found to function neither as a dependent variable with professional challenges nor an independent variable with behavior intention. The former relationship may have been due to misspecification of the types and sources of subjective norms necessary to be influenced by professional challenges. Of course, no relationship may truly exist between those constructs. In the case of the latter, the theory of planned behavior clearly suggests a relationship between subjective norms and behavior intention. Unless the theory is flawed in this particular context, a

relationship should have been found. Perhaps the subjective norms construct was too broadly defined when it included influences from administrators, co-workers, and family. The low reliability coefficients observed in both the pilot and main studies suggest that this is true. Future research should operationally define subjective norms construct components that either taken together represent one, more reliable construct or when distributed among difference sources better predict behavior intentions.

Fourth, this dissertation did not explore or include in its model actual leaving of the profession behavior by subjects. There is no way to determine whether behavior intention is enough to predict actual behavior. This is where current literature trends may benefit greatly from this research. It was argued that extant literature is retrospectively based; it examines statistics associated with retention and attrition but fails to take a prognosis stance on prevention. For example, professional challenges from driving intention to leave and actual leaving of the special education profession should be studied. By combining tradition methods and the model developed in this dissertation, a clearer picture can be obtained about what drives leaving of the profession, retention of quality special education educators, and failure to be attracted to the profession.

Finally, although sparse, the literature does contain some references and use of professional challenges that influence various factors related to mainstream and special education teachers. However, most research - this dissertation included - does not address the individual and personal challenges that influence a teacher's intention to leave the special education profession. In fact, extant research only includes external influences (e.g. administrative support, parental support, access to relevant materials,

access to training, and workload), factors primarily outside of the control of the teacher. Future research should include collection, measurement, and integration of constructs related to personal influences of intention to leave the profession.

Conclusions

Although no research is perfect and all attempts to study complex relationships among constructs are flawed, this dissertation nonetheless formed bases for understanding the antecedents of intentions to leave a profession and identified future research avenues into related topics. Most significant is the advancement of an important albeit underrepresented influencer of behavior intention. Professional challenges were shown to predict both job satisfaction and a significant component of the theory of planned behavior. The result is a clearer picture of occupational attrition and the components that influence it, thereby, illuminating paths to urban special education teacher retention.

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APPENDIX A
RESEARCH SURVEY

Special Education Teachers' Survey

June 2010

Dear Colleague:

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education. The purpose of this pilot study is to determine validity and reliability for the final survey I intend to use in my dissertation. With your participation, I can effectively draw conclusions that can be beneficial to schools and the research community. Therefore, I kindly request that you complete this survey which should take about 15 minutes to complete. It is very important that you complete the entire survey.

Please return your survey to the provider when you are done. Be assured that your responses and participation will be held in the strictest confidence. Neither your name nor the name of the school at which you are employed will be mentioned in any of the written results. Your participation is strictly voluntary. I hope you can assist me with this noteworthy project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research or completion of the survey, contact me at (xxx)-xxx-xxxx. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brenda Coleman Meloncon
Doctoral Candidate
Texas A&M
College Of Education
Department of Teaching Learning and Culture

Special Education Teachers' Survey v1.0

Instructions for Part I: Along with this survey, you were provided with an answer sheet onto which you will place all of your answers. Please go to the answer sheet now and fill out the items for Part I of the survey. When finished with Part 1, return to this page and continue on to Part II.

Instructions for Part II: Listed below are statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. For example, if you strongly agree with statement 1, write the number 7 next to that statement's number on the answer sheet. If you strongly disagree with statement 1, write a number 1 next to that statement's number on the answer sheet. Use numbers 2 through 6 to indicate intermediate responses between strongly agree and strongly disagree.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. The administrators at my school are not committed to helping me deliver quality education to my students.
2. The parents of my students do not understand my role as a special education teacher.
3. The classrooms at my school are inadequate to deliver quality education to my students.
4. I do not have access to additional training if I needed it to deliver quality education to my students.
5. The paperwork I have to fill out as part of my job is too time consuming.
6. In most ways, my job is close to my ideal.
7. Leaving the special education profession would be a good move for me.
8. People with whom I work would think that I should leave the special education profession.
9. If I wanted to, I could quit my job at any time.
10. I expect to leave the special education profession in the near future.
11. The administrators at my job have no idea about what is needed to deliver quality education to my special education students.

- 12. The parents of my students are not committed to giving their children every advantage when it comes to education.
- 13. My access to technology is not adequate to deliver quality education to my students.
- 14. In special needs situations, I do not have access to the training needed to deliver quality education to my students.
- 15. My caseload is too great to deliver the kind of quality education I want to provide to my students.

- 16. The conditions of my job are excellent.
- 17. Finding another teaching job would make me happier than I am now.
- 18. My family would think that I should find another teaching job.
- 19. Finding another teaching job would be easy for me.
- 20. I intend to find another teaching job soon.

- 21. The administrators at my school provide me with qualified personnel to help me deliver quality education to my students.
- 22. The parents of my students understand what they need to do to ensure quality education for their children.
- 23. I have access to the assessment tools I need to deliver quality education to my students.
- 24. My training makes me fully qualified to deliver quality education to my students.
- 25. I have enough time to plan lessons for my students.

- 26. I am satisfied with my job.
- 27. I would prefer to stay at my current job.
- 28. The administrators at my school would think that I should stay at my present job.
- 29. It would be difficult for me to find another job.
- 30. In the foreseeable future, I intend to keep the teaching job I have now.

- 31. The administrators at my job understand my role as a special education teacher.
- 32. I receive enough support from the parents of my students to deliver quality education.
- 33. I have access to enough classroom material to deliver quality education to my student.
- 34. If the need arose, I can count on getting additional training to deliver quality education to my students.
- 35. I have enough time to give individualized attention to each of my students.

- 36. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my job.
- 37. Making good career moves is important to me.
- 38. What the people with whom I work think is important to me.
- 39. Even if I wanted to, it would be hard for me to quit my job.
- 40. I want to quit my teaching job.

- 41. If I could live my life over, I would not change the choices made in my job.
- 42. Being happy at my job is important to me.
- 43. What my family thinks is important to me.
- 44. I could easily find another teaching job.
- 45. I desire to get a new teaching job.

- 46. Remaining at my current job is important to me.
- 47. What the administrators at my school think is important to me.
- 48. There are too many barriers for me to find another job.
- 49. Given the opportunity, I intend to stay at my current teaching job.

Answer Sheet

Part I:

1. Please circle your gender.

Male / Female

2. What is your age?

_____ years _____ months

3. Circle your ethnicity.

Caucasian

African American

Hispanic

Asian

Other (please indicate) _____

4. How long have you been a special education teacher?

_____ years _____ months

5. Circle the highest degree you hold.

Bachelor's

Master's

Doctorate

Other (please indicate) _____

Please return to the survey and continue with Part II.

Part II:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
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43. _____
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45. _____
46. _____
47. _____
48. _____
49. _____

Thank you for Participating!

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

An Examination of the Professional Challenges, Job Satisfaction, and Intention to Leave the Profession of Urban Special Education Elementary Teachers

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying perceptions of urban elementary special education teachers. The purpose of this study is to examine the professional challenges faced by such teachers. You were selected to be a possible participant because you were identified as an elementary special education teacher working in an urban area.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out a survey. The survey should take you about 15 minutes to fill out.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the answers you provide on the survey will help researchers understand how the professional challenges of elementary special education teachers who work in an urban setting affects such teachers' intentions to remain special education teachers.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or the school or district in which you teach being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is anonymous and only the investigators conducting this study will have access to the data collected in this study. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Brenda Meloncon (doctoral candidate) and Patricia Larke (dissertation chair) will have access to the records.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Brenda Meloncon by phone (xxx-xxx-xxxx), email (bmeloncon@aol.com), or postal mail.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

The Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University have reviewed this research study. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the thesis offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions, and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

VITA

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1980-2005 Speech Pathologist, Houston ISD
1991-1995 Department Chair of Special Education, Albert Thomas Middle School
1992-1995 ESL/GED Instructor, Catholic Charities
1976-1980 Resource Teacher, Speech Pathologist, Navasota ISD